THE CONQUERED

NAOMI MITCHISON

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The Conquered

VICTRIX CAUSA DIIS PLACUIT
SED VICTA PUELLIS

Gallia at the time of Caesar

THE CONQUERED

By

NAOMI MITCHISON

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To
MY BROTHER
J. B. S. HALDANE

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NOTE.—*Of the coins on the title-page, the first is a gold stater of Vercingetorix; the second is a denarius of L. Hostilius Saserna, struck about the time of Cæsar's Triumph, and bearing what is probably a portrait of Vercingetorix as a captive.*

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The Conquered

Chapter 1: *Autumn,* 58 *B.C.*

" Out of sedgy fields I came on Stráid-na-Cuacha.
What did you see there? Castles white with lime;
Cuckoos in gold cages, and black queens feeding them;
Trees dropping moons into vats of mead;
A goat-fair—goats whose horns were double rainbows;
Goat-herds, fiddling, naked babies dancing;
Jugglers throwing gourds through the rings of brooches;
Old Father Time sitting drunken on a stone.
Out of Stráid-na-Cuacha I came on ferny hills."

Joseph Campbell.

MEROMIC turned over and blinked at the light; the sea-mist was streaming away, thinner and thinner, whitely luminous already with the sun behind. He stretched out his arms and threw back the blanket: it was going to be a fine day and he could do anything he liked with it. Then, waking more fully, he remembered the evening before, the feast, young men and girls dancing and singing, talk of his sister's betrothal to Gandoc, the Briton, and after that the Council of the Cantons, his father and uncles speaking, the strength and glory of the Veneti! Turning over his father's speech in his mind, he thought how he himself would have altered a phrase here and there, rounded

the corners, put in more poetry. He wondered when he would make a speech first, compared occasions, considered an audience: grey heads nodding approval, admiring friends, bright faces of girls—oh, a whole crowd of them!

For a time his mind ran on girls, blue-eyed and fair-haired girls, running and dancing and swimming, the poise of a girl cousin of his reaching down nets from a high beam. At this he changed to fishing, then back, by way of mermaids, to that cousin of his; then off again to turn over all the rumours they had heard last night. The Gallic Council had asked the Roman General, Julius Cæsar, for help against the German king, Ariovistus; it was a good thing to set the bear and the dog at one another, cheer on whichever one chose, and in the end, turn out the bleeding victor with hardly enough breath left to growl! But the German bear had been conquered a little too easily, and the dog refused to be turned out. The central Cantons, even, seemed not to mind taking the dog as regent. Meromic thought scornfully of Ardorix of Curdun, that proud Arvernian who had lorded it so last year at the assembly with his hounds and horses and fine clothes, now under a Roman: never, never would that be said of him! Never of the Veneti, never of the coastwise Cantons! And it was in his mind that all these were brothers together, children of the Sealord, Mananaun, and that they must stand by one another always.

Still he lay there, his hands clasped under his head, dreaming big, beautiful, vague dreams of power and unity, the shining future and the gleaming past. The

mist was melted away by now, the sun shone full on him; he heard the distant, repeated turning over and over of low-tide waves; the gulls cried and the cocks crew; a maid went by under his window, singing, towards the byres; the air was cool and fresh, just faintly touched with the familiar smell of sea-weed and wet ropes.

Suddenly the curtain over the doorway was swept aside, and Fiommar, his sister, stood over him, a fishing-line in one hand. "Lazy one, get up!" she said. "Come out with me. I want to talk. The boat's down by the hollow rock; be quick or they'll see us—I must have one more whole day with you!" He yawned and grinned at her, not inclined to get up, but liking to see her stand beside him, free and fair and upright, a picture of the Celtic genius. Quickly she stooped and pulled the blanket right off him; on arms and body the thick golden down shone in the sunlight. He sat up, clasping one bare knee; Fiommar slid her hand down back and side, admiring the faint ripple of movement that followed her under the smooth skin. He put on his clothes in a minute; they both went barefoot. "Are you sure you can go?" he asked. "Doesn't father want you?" "I don't care," she said, "we'll be back in time for this evening. Do hurry, Meromic—we'll be caught!"

No one was about as they went down to the beach. Along the path there was a tangle of vetch and whin, old heather and brambles; the slope faced south and already the berries were colouring. At the very tip of a branch Fiommar found one ripe blackberry and gave it to her brother. "Do take it," she said; "I—

I don't know, only this seems like the last time we shall be really alone." But Meromic laughed at her: "Little silly, you're not going to be married yet awhile; we'll have lots more days."

They turned down. The cove where their boat lay was still damp and shadowed, but as they pushed off they came out again into the light; Meromic stood up between the thwarts and held out his arms towards Lugh the sun. Fiommar, rowing behind him, shut her eyes at the leaping dazzle on the water. "Where shall we go?" she asked. "Right out beyond Crabland?" "We'll see," he answered, and began to hoist the sail. There was a light south-easterly wind; they went up past the islands in long tacks; in the lee of the westernmost, the one they called Crabland, they anchored and dropped a line overboard. Fiommar had brought food with her, a solid hunk of rye-bread, cheese, blaeberries in a dock-leaf, and two or three raw mushrooms; they shared them, trailing their sun-burnt arms in the water and smiling at each other.

They caught one fish and pulled him inboard with much splashing. Then they rowed over to Crabland and waded across the shallow little bay, where they could see the crabs and star-fish on the warm, light-dappled bottom. Fiommar threw herself down on the turf—it was grazed by a few half-wild goats—and stuck her hands into it, pulling up pieces of thyme and throwing them at her brother.

The island was rocky, full of little caves and pockets, and almost bare to the west; but farther round it was overgrown with tamarisk, all blown one way by the prevailing wind, and the rocks were covered, be-

tween the old gulls' nests, with sea-pink and campion and samphire. Meromic and his sister knew it well; they had watched the beaches shift about as the sand buried or unburied this and that rock: they had caught young shags from their ragged, stinking nests, and brought them back to tame. They had often drunk at the spring which trickled out through a cleft in the rocks, not many feet above the highest tide-marks. It was a good spring: there was a rowan tree—the only one in the island—small, but always full of berries in autumn, growing out of the cleft above it: and below the harts-tongue ferns were forever bobbing in the drip; there were small flowers all about the rocks. Once, in a green summer dusk, Meromic had thought he had seen a fairy there; the next day he brought her milk and honey and a bunch of inland flowers: but he had not seen her again. When they were little they had always wanted to stay there for a whole night, but somehow they never had, and now they had almost forgotten about it.

"I should like to be buried here when I'm dead," said Fiommar. "Will you do it, Meromic?"

"I expect I shall be dead myself."

"But if you aren't—I don't want to be buried in Britain! I want to be brought back here: it's the best place I know. It's bad enough to have to go away in my life. Oh, think, this is the last day I shall be really free: after this evening he can send for me when he likes!"

"You're not to be married till the spring after next, Fiommar, and not then unless we've good promises from Gandoc and his people."

"Do you think you'll ever need them?"

"It's hard to say. If these Romans think that we in the North are going to give in to them——! *We* never asked them to fight our battles because we were too lazy to do it ourselves! *We* aren't afraid of the Germans! Their General won't attack us—not when he sees the Wolf showing his teeth: you heard what father said last night! But of course that's not all; I don't care what happens to the Southerners—Ardorix and his friends! They've brought it on themselves. But I do care very much what happens to some of the Cantons: there's Molhir of the Carnutes; I should be sorry to see him or his folk under the hand of the Roman. If that were ever to come, father and I would be bound to help, and we might need your Britons with us."

"I see. I liked Molhir. I wish it was him I was going to be betrothed to this evening."

"So do I. But father knows best. And it's not so far to Britain after all; if I go there for tin and hides I might just as well go to see my sister!"

"Oh, Meromic, you must! Promise to!" Her eyes were full of tears; never before had she seen quite so clearly all it would mean, the parting from home and friends and country; she would have to bear children to Gandoc, the stranger, suffer and grow old. She buried her face in the grass and threw out a hot, unhappy hand for Meromic to hold and stroke. In a minute or two he picked her up and petted her, and started talking about the islands and the sea and the fishing, all the familiar things they'd known together since they were babies.

By and by they were laughing, digging frantically for sand-eels, throwing water over one another, racing up and down the slopes, leaping the rocks, trying to catch the goats, screaming at the tops of their voices, and, when they were thoroughly hot, plunging into the sea, at high tide now, and swimming out to their boat. "I shan't be able to do this when I'm married!" sighed Fiommar, putting on her clothes. "Oh, do stop about being married!" the brother answered. "It's not that a bit, it's getting old. Uncle's not married, but he never goes swimming about—I wish he did!" It conjured up, for both of them, the infinitely ludicrous picture of their Druid uncle swimming very solemnly and completely in long white robes, with his mistletoe wreath just the tiniest bit on one side. "Singing hymns," suggested Fiommar; "and excommunicating the sharks," added her brother. They were fitfully religious, those two; sometimes it all took hold of them, very deeply, the ceremonial seemed part of the nature of things like tides and seasons, only more intimate, more beautiful: but not their own uncle!

The wind had veered round a little, but coming home they had to make short tacks, and row when they got under the lee of one of the islands. The sun set, flaming beyond the mouth of the bay, over those bigger, foamier waves, that went on and on for ever, till northward you came to Britain, and westward to that far Isle of the Dead, that they half believed in. They moored the boat and came lightly up the still path, where only yellow flowers yet showed colour; the shaggy horned cattle lowed at them over the turf walls; they saw the

flicker of bats, always half out of the circle of vision; the sea swung darkly and sleepily behind them. "We shall be just in time," whispered Fiommar, one hand on her hound's smooth head as they passed through the stack-yard. "Oh, Meromic, I have been happy!"

Torches were alight down the hall that evening, adding another layer of smoke to the blackened rafters; they were carried by men-at-arms or servants, who sometimes whirled them round their heads and sent the sparks flying. One group of torch-bearers stood behind Meromic's father, Kormiac the Wolf, who sat at the head of the feast, leaning forward with both elbows on the table to hear the harpers. His shirt and cloak were of tartan linen, blue and green and yellow, fastened with gold brooches; the hilt, scabbard and belt of his sword were inlaid with gold and coral, and there were bronze bracelets on his tough, hairy arms; under his thick grey hair and beard was more gold in a twisted collar. On his right sat his son-in-law to be, Gandoc the Briton, in a sleeveless coat of soft leather, fringed at the bottom and with patterns worked on it in black. He was very tall, with a reddish face, fair hair and beard, and the deep stain of woad across his forehead and the backs of his hands. Bracelets and rings and sword-hilt were bronze, but he wore a necklace of mixed boar's tusks and mother-of-pearl, and, hanging from it on a loop, a little greyish round of bone from some enemy's skull. Beside him was Fiommar in a long yellow dress, embroidered from neck to hem with fine curves of stem and leaf and the thin beaks of curlew; her hair was combed down her back and snooded with beads and gold; her

brooches were bows of silver and coral, her necklaces of amber and blue glass beads, and her cheeks were flushed in the hot hall. She had wanted to have her brother next her, and there he was, the Pride of the Islands, in his father's tartan, with gold on arms and neck, the plaid fastened on his left shoulder with a brooch of five interwoven circles of gold; for luck he had club-moss twisted over his hair, and one arm was round Fiommar's waist.

At Kormiac's other side was his elder brother, the Druid, robed and wreathed, beyond him two more brothers with their wives, and some other chiefs of the Veneti. Then, down both sides of the table, the fighting men in their order, many fully armed, most with cloaks of their lord's tartan. Then the women, a mass of brilliant colours, with naked children sprawling about the floor and babies they suckled to keep them quiet through the noise. Then, towards the end, a tangle of slaves and hounds, a favourite horse or two, and people coming in and out with plates and jugs.

The feast was almost over: piles of bones under the table, on it pieces of bread and smears of honey, scraps of cheese and butter, one or two overturned cups, and what-not. Fiommar had mixed a great bowl with milk, wine from the south, sweet, sticky mead and herb leaves, and this was being passed round, while the harpers played, the hounds fought over the bones, and the kempery men quarrelled with one another.

"Sing something, Meromic!" she said, and the Briton seconded it, anxious to please this son of the Wolf. A harp was passed across to him, and he sang, one foot on the table:

" A thousand, thousand folk come up, come up,
Out of the South, the sun, the ships, the sea,
Their eagles scream for blood—red let it be!
But the Wolf, wolf, wolf shall tear the eagle!

We gather, gather, gather in the North,
The Wolf, red-hearted, baying to the pack!
He leaps, he strikes, we follow at his back,
And the Wolf, wolf, wolf has torn the eagle! "

The kempery men shouted: this was what they liked! Kormiac smiled but shook his head at his son: " Not yet," he said, " wait till you've seen the blood run in earnest, Meromic." " It is a very strong eagle," said the Briton, " and the Gods that are helping it are strong Gods. The wolf may have his eyes torn by a snap of that beak; the wolf must go round, and wait till the eagle is asleep." Meromic tossed his head: " It is clear you know little of wolves! " Fiommar took the harp hurriedly from his hands: " Let me sing—there are other wolves."

" Moths fly round candles
And bats round the moon,
Dark after midnight
And dawn coming soon.
Wolf, wolf!
Bay at the moon!

Owls howl at midnight
And cocks crow at dawn,
Swift from his hill-top
Upstarting the fawn.
Wolf, wolf!
Bay at the dawn!

Over the hill-top
Comes leaping the sun,
Men waken, beasts waken,
Darkness is done.
Wolf, wolf!
Bay at the sun! "

Every one joined in at the end with echoing shouts of "Wolf! Wolf!" that made the harp strings sound, and Gandoc whispered to his bride, "It must be a song for me, next time!" He would have taken the harp himself then, but some one called from the bottom of the table, that a new story-teller had just come in. "Send him up!" shouted Kormiac, and up he came, a long, thin man, dressed in layer on layer of once bright-coloured rags, a cloak all tatters on his back, his little harp slung beside him in a patched bag, and a branch of green holly in his hand.

The story-teller looked round, bowed low to Kormiac, who handed him a cup of wine and bade him begin, took his harp out, struck a note, and began singing in a high voice so as to attract attention and get silence before his story.

"Oh, the bird is in the air,
The blossom is on the bough,
And I am harping in the hall,
A-harping to you now.

There was a king of Fach-na-Croich
He had one only daughter,
And all the words that she did say
Were sweet as running water."

Meromic and Fiommar had their heads together, whispering and looking at him. "Oh, look," said she, "there's something—can't you see it?—just by his head. A bird! But it can't be."

"It is,"—her brother leaned forward,—"I just got sight of a spread wing; at least I think so. Listen!"

The harp was full of over-tones, and sometimes there seemed to be birds' voices among them. A tiny grey feather came floating through the air above the table; Meromic reached up to catch it, but it was swept high out of sight by the up-draught from the torches. Fiommar turned to her betrothed: "Can you see—birds, anywhere?"

"Birds? No. There are no birds here. This good wine has gone to your head." She turned away; and all the time during the story she and her brother were intent on that little space round the teller's head: for sometimes it was empty, yet always, just as they looked away, there came a fluttering, the glimpse of a linnet with its wings up, a settling thrush, two finches playing, or the dart of a sea swallow.

"Now the likeness of this princess, whose name was Esa of the Blue Mantle, was to the yellow-haired bride that I see sitting on the right hand of the head of this house. And she went walking out every day with her maidens behind her, to the back of the hill where there was an orchard of sweet apples. And there was a young man going about in those parts, and he was son to the King of the Country of Red-Haired men: and he had a white horse with one black tip to its ear, and a hound that was so quick-footed it would catch the wild geese before they rose in the air. He

went hunting all those hills and glens after a deer with a gold collar, and it ran till it came to the hill of the orchard, and there it cried aloud to the young princess Esa, as she was washing her linen in the cold spring, 'Oh, princess,' . . ."

Kormiac was thinking that if ever there was going to be war between them and the Romans he would do well to build another ship: he must see to having the timber cut and weathered, and the hides prepared for the sails. His brother the Druid was thinking of how some day he might be made Chief Druid of all the Druids of Gaul, and if that happened he would make a sacrifice of hares and geese and cattle and prisoners, and he himself would be there in the midst, with the chain of red stones about his neck and the golden sickle in his hand. Gandoc the Briton was thinking that before he brought his new bride into his house he would need to put away the woman he had there already and the young children he had by her; and his heart was sore at that, because she was a tall, fine woman, but yet it was very needful for their trade in tin and iron that he should be friendly with Kormiac. Fiommar was sometimes looking for the birds, and sometimes listening to the story, and sometimes thinking what a bad thing it was to be come to an age for marriage, and how she had never seen a man to compare with her brother for looks, but if she had she would sooner marry him than the Briton. And Meromic was looking for the birds too, and feeling the hilt of his sword and wishing the time was come to draw it in battle, and then he'd fall to making patterns on the table with the spilled wine or playing with the tips

of Fiommar's hair. The kempery men were some of them listening to the story, and some of them boasting of the hard blows they had struck, and some of them making love to the women. Kormiac's own harpers were jealous of the man, and each was saying that he could play better than that thirty years ago, and now he could play five times as well. And the hounds and the slaves were asleep on the floor.

". . . and when he had done that the iron chains that lay across the door parted with a noise like thunder, and there was Esa standing at the foot of the steps, and the deer with the golden collar beside her. And the King's son took her by the hand and they stepped onto the broad back of the swan. Nine days and nights they were on the swan's back, but the tenth day they came to the hill of the orchard, and there were all the maidens still making a great lamentation for Esa who had been stolen away from among them. And the King, her father, the old white-bearded King of Fach-na-Croich, came out of his high house in a long robe of scarlet, and he gave his daughter to the young champion, and with her a hundred horses and a hundred dun cattle, and a ring with power to make the wearer ever beautiful; and he took her home with him to the Country of Red-haired Men, and there was gladness there when they saw him coming with his young queen, and after that she was with him always."

Kormiac spoke courteously to the story-teller and gave him a piece of gold, and Fiommar smiled at him.

" Now," said the story-teller, " I will do some tricks for you. Here is a little old woman of mine; I will match her against any of your young men at the wrest-

ling." And he put his hand into his bag and drew out by the hair a little thin old woman, and he fixed his eye on Meromic. "Son of the head of this house," he said, "I see by your arms that you are a good wrestler, and yet you will not be able to thrown down my champion." At this, Meromic leapt over the table and came down scornfully to the middle of the room. "I can throw her over my shoulder with one hand!" said he, and went up to her. But she clutched him with her two skinny arms, and there was so much power in her that Meromic could not lift a finger against her, and, when all the hall had seen it, she let him go and the story-teller put her back into his bag. And he took another thing out of his bag, and it was a little stool about the height of a young hound. He said to Meromic, "I see by your foot you are a good leaper, yet you cannot leap this little stool of mine." And Meromic could not leap it, no more than if it had been a haystack.

Then the story-teller said, "I thank you for the entertainment you have given me in this house; one day I will come back." Kormiac would have bidden him stay longer, but he opened the bag again, and he took out of it a long, red rope with knots in it; he tossed it up to the rafters with one hand and there it stayed, and up he climbed and into the roof, and there he went out of sight like a blown candle flame and the end of the rope withered like the smoke of the candle, and there was nothing else, only a bird's feather floating in the air.

Meromic went back to his place by Fiommar with his hand up to his head, and all that evening he was

silent, and as if he was listening for something. The Briton filled his cup and drank, and turned to Kormiac. "Certainly that was a good story-teller," he said, "but we have better in Britain."

Chapter 2: *Spring to Winter,* 57 *B.C.*

"He that will to Cupar, maun to Cupar."

TITUS VETURIUS BARRUS had grown up very much under his grandfather's influence; he was taught to disapprove of scent and pretty clothes and Greek singers and frivolous poetry. And at nineteen he did not quite realize that one political party has very seldom any more principles than another.

He had been educated chiefly at home, under approved tutors, though once he went to Greece and loved it and would have liked to stay longer, but his grandfather sent for him back, fearing the enervating effect of Greek society. He was shy and had very few friends of his own age; they found him a little dull, a little too full of the early Roman virtues. So instead of amusing himself with women and politics among his contemporaries, he stayed at home and read a good deal; his grandfather did not altogether like Aristotle and the Neo-Pythagoreans, but if he didn't read Greek, what was he to read? Ennius was rather impossible; Catullus was equally impossible—in other ways. Of course there was always Varro on agriculture; but Varro was quite often at the house himself; he disapproved of the way Caius Barrus ran his estate.

But by this time Titus Barrus was beginning to be bored. And the more he found out that his grand-

father was not, after all, the most perfect type of civilization, the more his grandfather delighted in him and gave him everything he asked for. The old man had visions of his grandson reforming society, reviving the citizen spirit, putting back the aristocracy into its right place, restoring order and stability, the good old days. . . . But Titus wanted to go soldiering, just as his father had done; and he wanted to go somewhere where there was a real war; and he had been very much excited by the campaigns against the Helvetii and the Germans; and, in fact, he wanted to go to Gaul. Which was all very distressing, because the proconsul Julius Cæsar was the most terrible radical, the worst enemy the state had ever had—worse than his Uncle Marius even! But Titus meant to go; he was a very persistent young man, and go he finally did. It was to be hoped that his admirable upbringing would counteract the evil influences he was sure to meet with in Gaul.

In early April, when all the vines were budding, Titus Barrus rode north through Italy; he wore his new armour a little self-consciously and his military knowledge was only theoretical. But he had the best horse money could buy, and an old servant went with him. At night he stayed with friends of his grandfather's in country houses among flowering orchards; there was more than one pretty daughter who would have taken a kiss in a corner from him, but he never looked her way.

He found Gaul vastly interesting; he wanted to stop everywhere, see everything, observe the customs of the country, collect the very charming native enamel work,

and learn Gallic. But the Belgians were arming in the North; he had to hurry. He arrived at Vesontio, reported, and was told to keep out of the way till some one had time to show him what to do. For the first few weeks, of course, he was a thorough nuisance, though not so much so as some of the young officers, as he was modest, attentive and sensible, had a good memory, and was very keen on becoming efficient.

He learnt something about quickness in the hurried march north, that ended on the bank of the Axona; and he learnt much—admiringly—about Cæsar, when he saw him receive and welcome the envoys from the friendly Remi. He knew enough to carry messages at the battle of the bridge-head, and was very glad to have something to do. He had never seen a dead body near by, only at the safe and unreal distance of the theatre, and that not often. Once he had ridden at a gallop through a little wood and a gap in a turf wall, straight into a knot of Belgians. He drew his sword and slashed at them as he plunged through, and found it afterwards dripping with a new red. His servant congratulated him on it afterwards; he was one of Cæsar's officers and had killed an enemy of the Republic! If he had killed him: which was unlikely.

After that battle, which broke up the power of the Belgic League, he wrote a long letter to his grandfather; it took nearly a month to get South. Caius Barrus, forgetting to be calm, tore it open with shaking hands, and read it through, murmuring the words over to himself. The boy was finding himself then! He would be like his father—how well the old man

remembered *his* first letter! He took it out of the cedar-wood box and looked at them together; the writing was much the same, they used the same phrases. Twenty years ago—no, it was more: how short it seemed . . . he thought of his wife reading over that first letter with him, the mother's tears and laughter and pride: so it should be. But she was dead long ago; and his pretty daughter-in-law had died too, when Titus was a baby. . . . He turned back to the letter to read it more attentively.

Titus was well; he had been to the doctor with a cut leg, but it was nothing (he'd be sure to say that, even if it was bad). He thought he was beginning to be some use (of course!). His horse was splendid. The barbarians were brave but easily discouraged: they would not hold out much longer; he was learning their language but found it difficult. He liked most of his fellow officers and thought they liked him; there was a Tribune called Quintus Velanius (now who could he be? It seemed a respectable name: he must find out), they had shared a tent for two or three nights and had made friends; Quintus had read Thucydides and they had discussed history together.

The next sheet. He was very favourably impressed with his superior officers. He had heard so much against the proconsul before he went out, but it was entirely his doing that the battle was won, still more that it was followed up afterwards—the most important thing of all. Quintus Velanius believed in him too. He wished his grandfather would tell people in Rome that he had been misjudged—after all, politics were not everything, and Cæsar had reorganized

the army, Cæsar had seen to the engineers, Cæsar was so wonderful with the barbarians, Cæsar this and Cæsar that!

Caius Barrus frowned: what had come over the boy? At this rate he would be a radical before he came home! He sat down and wrote to his grandson, thanking him for his news, telling him about their friends, the state of the crops, the latest intelligence from the East, then going on about Cicero's return from exile, at last, only to find his house in Rome burnt, his country villas plundered—such was the respect paid nowadays to true patriotism! He ended up with a few scandals about that profiteer Crassus, a few remarks about Cæsar's morals, and an assurance that now the democrats would soon be out of power and right would triumph in the end.

Titus Barrus got the letter just before the battle with the Nervii, so nearly lost, but so completely won!—and all through Cæsar. He was growing experienced by now: thus rapidly did the proconsul's young men learn. And after all that slaughter, so wide a clemency: the survivors allowed to keep all their lands and villages, and given protection, now they were helpless, against their neighbours! Then, after that, came the siege of the city of the Atuatuci; the town had capitulated on the usual terms, but nearly half the arms had been kept back; in the night the garrison rushed on the Romans, thinking to take them unawares, but were surrounded and cut to pieces. As a punishment, the whole of the townspeople, some fifty thousand, they heard, were sold as slaves; a severe sentence, thought Titus, but well justified against treachery. After that

the rest of the Belgian tribes gave in altogether, surrendering on almost any terms, and the campaign was over for the year.

Titus read his grandfather's letter over again; it seemed almost incredible that people should think and speak so of Julius Cæsar! He took it over in the evening to his new friend, Quintus Velanius; he found him in his tent, a tall, open-faced young man with a brown skin, freckled across the nose. He read the letter and threw it back to Titus with a laugh: "You don't suppose they understand about him in Rome? My dear man, they don't begin to! They give him a thanksgiving when he's beaten two nations in four months, and then forget all about him! We know, of course, and any one else who has anything to do with him; but the Alps take a deal of crossing. Even your grandfather's bound to find out about Cæsar some day, though. Only, don't let him change you in the meantime."

"Oh, it'll take more than a letter to do that! But I'm glad Cicero's back in Rome."

"Cæsar'll be glad too. Good men get together. Titus, I'm going to get leave to go to one of the warm springs in the South if things are quiet this Autumn. Those Germans got me a bad arm last year; every one says these springs are the best thing for stiffness. If you can get off too, will you come with me?"

"I'd like nothing better. They're in the Arvernian country, aren't they?"

"Yes: up in the hills. All very friendly, I believe. You'd be able to pick up plenty of your old pots and pans there!"

"Well, it seems to me to be good art—for barbarians."

He wrote back to his grandfather that he was glad about Cicero's return, and they had just won the most splendid victory over the Belgians; also that he was going to visit some of the towns in southern Gaul that Autumn. And he sent him a Belgian slave, but the man fell sick and died on the journey, and that was so much money wasted: not that prisoners were at all expensive just then, but still it was a pity.

In Autumn, after Cæsar had definitely annexed Gaul, the two young officers set out with their servants and horses; everywhere the country people stared at them—they were just beginning to realize the Romans as a fact in their lives. The corn was all in stooks in the Arvernian fields, and the fruit was mostly gathered, as they rode up along that very fertile valley which runs north and south through the hills. The warm springs were high up among the pines, with big, straggling villages all round them, continually filling and refilling with sick people. The Romans installed themselves in a long, low house of pine logs with a thatched roof and good stables, that lay in a sunny hollow of the woods, a little south of the springs. Quintus Velanius consulted the local doctor and made offerings at the local shrines, which were many. He was prescribed for with much ceremony: baths, waters to drink, exercise, massage by a very pretty little slave with soft, strong hands and two long plaits that were always dropping over her face and tickling the patient's arm. Titus began by taking the waters too, but found them much too nasty and so had baths instead, went

for long rides in the country, and made friends with various Gauls. He was learning Gallic fairly quickly, and, better still, he was never shy of talking a foreign language, even if he only knew a few words; he was much more awake since leaving his grandfather. Besides, the Gallic nobles could generally speak some Latin or Greek, and even read it.

Autumn was always the best time of year at these springs; the small wars were mostly over, and so was the busiest season of the harvest; but it was still warm enough to lie out in the sun under the pines or sit on the stone steps by the springs, talking to one's friends and throwing little pine cones at the slave-girls who came to dip out the water. Titus was sitting there one afternoon, looking out over the hazy valley, and observing, out of the tail of his eye, two young Arvernian nobles who were standing on the steps a little to his right; he thought he saw the beginnings of a promising quarrel. Neither of them was much older than himself and they were a good-looking pair. One stood on the top of the steps, his hands on his hips, in coat and breeches of tartan, with heavy golden tassels on the plaid; his thick hair was held in place by a circle of leather, which dangled on to his forehead, and over his ears bright squares of Hæduan enamel, dark blue and brilliant red. The other looked up at him, frowning; he wore a different tartan with more yellow in it, and on a chain round his neck swung a silver cock with crest and eyes of garnet. They both had swords and daggers and seemed as if they might use them.

Titus tried to make out what they were saying and caught scraps of it; they seemed to have been having

a boasting-match—a very Gallic thing to do!—and now they were both talking at once about their own possessions, their own places, Curdun, Gergovia. The Roman looked round at that, thinking that the man from Gergovia must be the young chief Vercingetorix, lover of civilization, encourager of trade and the Greek artists—he wore a finely-cut Grecian emerald on his right hand—one of the Gauls whom Cæsar had charmed to be his friend. He heard him say, "And I've a black colt, Coré, that I'll back against anything of yours!" The other answered scornfully, "You and your colts! Haven't you a better test than that? Or are you afraid?" Both had their hands on their swords now, and Titus was frankly staring at them; there was a clear space, level both ways, at the top of the steps; they went up, and the drawn steel flashed in the sun. "To the death, Ardorix?" said Vercingetorix, softly, and "Yours!" the chief of Curdun threw back at him.

They moved about, light-footed, sword in the right hand, dagger in the left, each trying to get the sun into the other's eyes. Titus watched from the steps: this was more exciting than the arena! But he didn't want to be drawn into it himself. Then suddenly everything happened with a rush: the fighters closed, with the whickering clash of steel on steel: a girl with a baby in her arms ran screaming past him up the steps, straight at the fight, right on to the swords! Titus leapt the top steps after her, trying to stop her being killed; he found himself in the thick of it, stammering Gallic at the top of his voice, a man's wrist in one hand, the other dripping blood from a cut

palm. Every one was shouting, plunging about—barbarians! Two other men were separating the fighters, and then the girl collapsed heavily on to Titus' shoulder. There was a deal of blood everywhere; it was dripping steadily from his hand, which he clenched to stop the flow; the girl? She was unhurt; but as she undid the plaid there was wail on wail from the child, its face all crumpled up with pain, its hands clutching at air. The mother sank to her knees, tearing at the brooch to get her dress open; the baby fastened on to her breast with a sob, and sucked hard for a minute before it started screaming again; its soft little arm was cut from elbow to shoulder.

They had it bandaged up in a minute; quite wonderfully soon it quieted down and was sucking happily but for a little sobbing moan from time to time, as the girl rocked herself to and fro with it. But if Ardorix was angry before, he was raging now. "My son," he cried, "my son—you've hurt him! You coward, you shall pay for this!" and then, furiously, to the man who held him back, "Let be, Caltane! Where's my sword? I'll have his heart out!"

Caltane, his cousin, kicked the sword further away and held on to him still: "Why were you fighting? Who was here? What happened?"

And Vercingetorix, panting, said, "I never meant this—on my honour, I never meant it! How could I know there was a child?"

"My son—my baby son—he may die of it! That on you!"

"I'll give you any satisfaction you ask."

Caltane and the other man cried out at this, "That's

fair, that's honest dealing! Ardorix, listen to what he says—put a fine on him! "

The baby was nearly asleep, the sudden heavy sleep of exhaustion; his mother's hair fell over him, she was crying like a child herself. Ardorix knelt beside her, stroking the back of her neck: "What fine, Guemoné? "

She whispered back, passionately, "Nothing—kill him! "

But the moment was passed; he turned to the others, a little doubtful: "Caltane——? Molhir——? "

But they shook their heads: "No, no, a fine! Name it, we'll see he gives it! "

Vercingetorix picked up his sword and laid it down at Guemoné's small feet: "Let the child take this when he's grown; he'll be proud to have it then—my sword."

Ardorix got to his feet slowly, surprised: "You give your sword? "

"A sword for a right arm. And here——" He pulled off the rings from his right hand, the emerald among them.

"A good fine," said Caltane; but Guemoné glowered, with a white, tear-streaked face: "My eldest son can be wounded then, if his father is paid for it! "

Ardorix looked uncertainly from one to the other; all at once Molhir said, "Make the Roman judge! He was here before any of us."

They all turned to Titus, and Guemoné saw his cut hand. "Oh," she cried, "you're hurt too—trying to help! Yes, I'll take your word over this."

Titus did not in the least want to be judge, but he

felt as if this was perhaps the best chance he would ever have of impressing the Gauls with Roman justice and dignity. He asked them to come with him to his house, hoping that they might all have calmed down by then. They agreed; Guemoné got up from the ground very carefully so as not to wake the baby; Molhir and Caltane picked up the sword and the rings.

At the house, wine was offered, Quintus Velanius sent for the doctor to see the baby, and the two Romans listened to the whole story. It was obviously not in their interest to make enemies on either side; they compromised, with many words and much soothing down of the angry barbarians. In the end Guemoné was the only one who was not satisfied, and they gave her a pot of ointment for the child, which had come all the way from Egypt, and seemed to pacify her a little. Titus watched her sideways; she was a pretty girl—oh, very pretty!—hardly full grown as yet, fifteen years old perhaps, not more; her hair was curled in a yellow fleece across her back and over her temples; her blue, resentful eyes matched the blue stones of her necklace; how creamy-white her breast had been as she suckled the child! He liked these blonde, firm-limbed Gallic women: something to bite on. . . . The doctor came and pronounced favourably on the baby, but he began to fret again, and Guemoné rose to go. The chief from Curdun and the chief from Gergovia were quite friendly as they went out, and the Roman officers congratulated one another on a good day's work; this was the way to make their rule welcome in the new province; this was how Cæsar would have wished them to be.

Vercingetorix went back to Gergovia the next week. The others stayed on rather longer; Ardorix used to go about a great deal with his cousin Caltane, but yet they were not too good friends. The baby got well, but his right arm was never so strong as his left, and the red scar was always there to keep his mother angry every time she saw it.

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Molhir of the Carnutes was going to be a Druid; he was learning the ritual and the hymns, all their unguessable and complicated secrets; but it would be months yet before he could make his first sacrifice. In the meantime he travelled and observed and made friends; it was all part of his preparation to learn what men were like. He liked these Arvernians less than he liked the Celts of the north, the Veneti, Meromic and his sister for instance. And he liked the Romans, as a whole, even less; he felt them a menace to druidism, these straightforward, deliberate people; they were hard to frighten, hard to influence; they would think nothing of laying axes to the sacred groves if they had the will to do it.

The Romans went back, too, at the end of Autumn; Quintus Velanius was actually rather better, and thought himself even more so. Publius Crassus, the Legate under whose command they were, had quartered his legions among the friendly people in northern Gaul. Titus was beginning to be quite happy; he liked the camp life, the long lines of huts with fires in front of them, the sound of marching feet, the trumpet calls on winter evenings. And he liked dealing with the Gauls, getting in food, buying horses, settling disputes between them and the soldiers.

He only wished he could do something about his servant; this old freedman of his grandfather's had the greatest objection to anything out of the way, particularly the Gallic stuffs and ornaments which Titus wanted to have decorating his hut; and he somehow made it difficult for Titus to ask a guest to come in. Particularly a she-guest. Perhaps it was only that he reminded that young man of his grandfather; but he was certainly trying.

Corn was beginning to run short and could not be had locally; there was the same trouble at some of the other winter-quarters. So a few of the officers were sent off to requisition it from the further tribes. Quintus Velanius and Titus Barrus rode out of the camp together, with a small following of soldiers, army accountants and slaves; they headed north-west, bound for the barley-growing cantons of Aremorica. It was the depth of winter, and the paths were sometimes hard to find, but they could always get guides from one village to the next. Titus watched his friend at work in a couple of places: it seemed easy; the landowners, chiefs and magistrates, with whom they had to deal, were on the whole willing to sell the corn at a reasonable price. He went on by himself, half afraid of the responsibility, half delighted to have it; he used to ride alone in front of his men, watching the seagulls wheeling above the frozen fields, and feeling intensely proud of being a Roman and one of Cæsar's officers.

He went from town to town of the Veneti, bargaining, drawing up contracts, hiring horses to send the corn back on; he always tried to be as friendly as pos-

sible with the Gauls, modelling himself on his great commander, and very soon he could speak Gallic well enough never to need an interpreter. But, as he went up among the Veneti, further and further from his base, he began to notice that they were getting less friendly. He would perhaps get his corn, but the country people would throw stones at him; one or two of his men got killed in quarrels with the natives, and it seemed impossible to find out who had done it or get justice from the local chief. He began to be uneasy and thought he would turn back at once; he had nearly the full tale of corn.

He was in a small town near the coast, waiting to put through the last of his negotiations; the chief had made some delays, but finally the corn had appeared and was duly being weighed and checked by the accountants in the market-place. Titus had left them to it and was walking up and down the main street, which was unusually full of Gauls; his own men were just a handful, standing together beside the corn-sacks or leading the horses about to keep them warm. It was a chill, bright day; the ruts all along the street were frozen into hard edges with thick ice on the pools between; every now and then Titus slipped and cursed his nailed boots. On each side there was a long row of mud and wattle huts, with thatch hanging in deep eaves over the doors; in front of one there would be salted fish for sale, cheese or cloth in front of another.

The street sloped up, round a dozen sharp corners, towards the chief's house at the end, a big, scrambling place with a tower at each side, all round it sheds, haystacks, barns and stables, and finally a five-foot turf

wall, wide enough to walk along, and a ditch that was frozen over except in one place where the ice had been broken for cattle to drink. Titus heard a horseman coming up behind; the hoofs rang on the hard ground as he trotted past and on to the castle; Titus thought he must be a messenger from the chief's over-lord, Kormiac the Wolf, partly because of the way every one stared after him, partly because of the wolf's head in black on the pennon at the end of his lance. The news might be anything, of course, but still Titus felt a little uneasy and turned to go back.

A glance at the castle showed him a score of armed horsemen riding down; he began to hurry along the slippery street. A couple of men came out of one of the huts with some story of pack ponies to sell, and, when he told them he didn't want any, caught him by the sleeve to keep him. He shook them off and went on down the street; an old woman came up to him and stopped him, saying that one of his soldiers had broken into her house and ill-treated her and her daughter—what compensation would he give her? He bade her come along with him and show him which man it was; she hobbled beside him, talking all the time. For a moment he kept pace with her, then broke away again, bidding her follow. Then it was more people with things to sell, crowding all round him, getting in his way, shouting so that he couldn't hear if there were horses coming up behind him or not! He told them to come after him to the market-place, where he would settle with them all; they were still thick in front of him and he drew his sword, nervously, to clear a passage. He felt like running but tried not to show it,

and only walked as fast as he could. Suddenly he slipped again and fell on his back, hitting his head on the edge of the rut. His sword flew out of his hand, he rolled over in a desperate clutch at it, but the whole town was on top of him! He fought them furiously, biting and kicking, and was nearly up once, but they knocked all the breath out of him and kept him down; he was gagged before he could shout twice, and elbows and wrists were tied behind him. The horsemen from the castle were all round him, with the chief himself at their head, who hoisted him up in front of his saddle, with a great shout of laughter and "Come along, baby!"

Titus Barrus blushed from ear to ear: he had fallen into the trap so easily! What would Quintus Velanius say? What would his Legate think?—and Cæsar—and his grandfather! His helmet had fallen off, and some one reached over and put it on to him back-side-foremost: the abominable Gallic sense of humour! He was an ambassador too, or as good, come on an errand of peace; it was contrary to all right—even the barbarians must know it! What did they mean to do with him? The final humiliation was when his nose started bleeding: after that he felt as if nothing else they could do to him would matter.

They came to the market-place; first of all the chief, with Titus very conspicuously a prisoner, and then the horsemen with a great mob of townspeople, all more or less armed, behind them. The accountants and slaves almost all dropped the corn-sacks and weights and money-bags, and fell on their knees, holding out their hands for mercy; the half-dozen soldiers ran together

and faced the Gauls, with drawn swords and a very Roman firmness. The chief undid the piece of stuff from over Titus' mouth, saying, " Speak to them. We don't want bloodshed."

Titus looked round: he hadn't the least chance of being rescued. " What terms do you give them? " he asked.

" Their lives, and they'll not be badly treated."

" Very well." So he shouted to his men to surrender, as they were far outnumbered. They threw down their swords, and the Gauls took them and the others off to the castle, not always even troubling to tie their hands.

Titus said nothing at first; he was trying to hear what the Gauls were saying to one another, and also wondering what exactly he ought to do; it wasn't a situation he had ever considered. The Gauls were too irritatingly pleased with themselves; the chief wagged his great red beard and told his men how Kormiac would praise them all. One of them rode up with a sack of corn across his horse's back behind, a bag of gold in front; he shouted, " I've been marketing with the Romans! " They all laughed and the chief poked Titus in the ribs. At the castle gate they dismounted and marched him up between them to the hall, where all the women had collected; he heard the story of his capture repeated with comic additions, and the young maids crowded round to stare at him and stick bits of hay into his hair. He was then put into chains, which were heavy but not so painful as the ropes, and, besides, left him enough liberty to move his arms and walk.

The chief sat down in a great carved chair, close to the fire, and started drinking at once. Titus was brought up to him and began, with his heart rather in his throat, by blaming his captor for using violence on one who should have been safe by all the laws of nations, and then asked why he had done it. The chief pointed a large hairy forefinger at him and said, "If you Romans think we don't know all about you, you're wrong. Who wants to go to Britain and take all our trade away? You! Who thinks we're going to lie down under it? You! Who's going to get a surprise? You!" and he very cheerfully offered Titus a drink. It was no good trying to get information out of him; he was obviously acting under orders. But he treated Titus and his men very well; it would have been a different matter if they'd been taken prisoner during a war, but just now the Gauls were in a good temper.

Later in the evening a man ran breathlessly up the hall, and threw himself in front of the chief with a message which set all the drinkers shouting and clashing their swords. Quintus Velanius had been taken, and news was coming in from the Aremorican chiefs in all the cantons that the rest of the Roman officers who had been sent to buy corn were safely prisoners. Titus was almost glad; if he had been an idiot, at least it was in good company. But what was it all about? Suddenly he remembered that Crassus had hostages from all these tribes; so presumably the intention was that they should be exchanged for the hostages. Not that a Roman General would ever let himself be dictated to like that by barbarians! But in the meantime he

could eat and drink with these Gauls. Their clothes were rougher—more skins and less woven stuff; their houses were much more primitive; the men almost all had long beards instead of shaving, and altogether they were less civilized than the Arvernians and Hæduans he had been seeing lately.

A week later another of the messengers came, this time for him to be taken off to the over-lord, Kormiac; he had to leave his men behind, and went off himself on a pony between armed guards. They rode out from the town on to a wind-swept moor where they seemed to be guided by the rare trees they passed from time to time. The snow was not very deep, though sometimes it had drifted into hollows where the ponies stumbled; once three of them fell and he was thrown off and got rather uncomfortably tangled in his chains. They stayed the night in a bothy where the shepherd's wife fed them on rye-bread and strips of dried meat. Towards the afternoon of the next day they came to their journey's end; a thaw had set in, with slanting rain, and all the burns in heavy spate and dangerous to cross; soon they and the ponies were mud from head to foot and soaking wet. Titus heard the sea roaring in front of him and caught a glimpse of it, grey and forbidding under the rain, as they came up on to the cliffs.

The house stood rather by itself, without the usual surrounding village, but there were any amount of out-buildings on each side; it was built of wood with great blocks of granite as a foundation, round three sides of a courtyard where the maids splashed across with their skirts up to their knees; the walls were all

lime-washed and the doors outlined in red, but it didn't look cheerful in this weather. Inside it was rather dark; most of the windows had been shuttered against the wet, and the fires only lighted the two ends of the hall. He and his guard went up to the further one, and waited, dripping on to the floor and warming their chilled hands. At the other side of the fire several women were standing round a loom, where already the upper third of the stuff was woven; two of them were altering the weights that held down the warp threads; another held the shuttle and directed them. Further from the fire a slave girl with matted hair stood spinning wool, the distaff under her left arm; her twisting spindle rose and fell quickly and regularly; the creamy wool shone in the firelight. The three at the loom looked round at the prisoner—tall, kindly girls, one fair head and two brown. They had long skirts with embroidered hems, short-sleeved bodices of fine wool, and leather brogues; bracelets were bronze and coral; their hair was loose. The fair one had gold ear-rings, each with a coral bead, and swung on a leathern thong, a pendant of bronze; she looked up and smiled at Titus as she and her women went back to their work.

They had been waiting about half an hour, and were beginning to get warm, though not yet dry, when a big, loose-limbed boy ran in, shaking the rain out of his hair; he was younger than Titus, but taller already. The fair girl called to him and he came over, glancing at guards and prisoner, then pulled off his clinging wet shirt and trousers and threw them down in front of the fire. He kept on his shoes and a great

golden necklace, all finely wrought with twists and spirals, and roundels of scarlet enamel. "Father's coming back," he said, "but the bay mare's slipped her shoulder; the road's all mud outside."

"Oh," said the girl, "he won't like that!"

"He doesn't. So you'd better keep out of the way, Fiommar." And he went off himself.

A few minutes later there was a great stir; the women looked at one another questioningly, and Titus turned to see his real captor, Kormiac the Wolf, who came in with great strides, a huge man; the scabbard of his sword clattered against the door jamb, his plaid swung behind him. The guards brought Titus forward, a hand on each shoulder; he felt rather small. Kormiac stuck his chin out, frowning at him: "So this is the man, is it? Take him off at once and see he's chained fast. Why in God's name couldn't you have done it already?" The man stammered apologies; Kormiac turned his back, with "Don't talk. Get on with it."

But suddenly the girl spoke: "Father, you're surely not going to send him down to the prison like this! It's not dry, and he's wet: he'll die of cold!"

"What's that to you? Do you suppose our hostages have any better quarters? You wouldn't talk like that if I'd had to send Meromic!"

But Fiommar went up to her father, put her arm round his neck and looked up at him with calm eyes: "Now, father, don't be hasty! You must let him get dry. He hasn't even had anything to eat."

At this Kormiac swung off to "What were you doing not to feed him, then?"

"I was waiting for you to come home; now we can have supper."

She called to the slave girl, who dropped her distaff and ran out, and then set herself to soothing her father down, so that by the time the food was on the table he was almost in a good temper. And she sent for dry clothes for Titus, who was shivering with the beginnings of a chill, and watched him change, much to his embarrassment.

They ate together, but Kormiac was still moody, and Titus was much too frightened of him to do any talking himself. Meromic came back rather late, but he didn't talk either, except in undertones to the man next him; and he went out early with a muttered excuse about riveting a shield-grip. Fiommar tried to keep the old Wolf on to pleasant subjects, but after a whole jar of mead to himself, he remembered the mare with a start and a curse, and bade them take the Roman down, and chain him to a staple.

So they marched him off, one man ahead with a flare to light them down stone steps and along passages that dripped water on their heads. The place where they chained him was a sort of cave hollowed in the rock, sloping up from the main tunnel; there was a barred opening four feet up, on the level of the ground outside, and gusts of rain blew in through it. The mud floor was streaming with cold trickles, and the bundle of straw they brought with them was soon sopped. For five days Titus Barrus lay there wretchedly in the grip of his chill; Fiommar or one of her maids came down from time to time with food and curious medicines, but he was too ill to take much

notice. He woke up on the morning of the sixth day, feeling much better; the early sun shone in brightly from outside, and he stood in front of the grating, trying to get as much of it as he could. Suddenly he heard a great baying of hounds out of sight, and in a moment they were pelting past, just at the other side, great long-legged deer-hounds, black and grey, with collars of bronze on their stretched necks! And all at once there was Meromic running in the middle of them, leaping high in the sunlight, crying loud and ringingly to the pack, his feet no heavier than theirs. Not more than time to see him, and he was gone. The prisoner shook angrily at the bars, envying that barbarian boy out there, so free and alive and careless; then he turned away, catching himself up sharply: he was a Roman officer and a patrician, and—oh, this prison couldn't last forever!

And indeed they came the same day and brought him up; Kormiac was in a good temper again and a different man: genial, kindly, slapping the young Roman on the back, laughing monstrously at his own jokes, calling Fiommar away from her work to sing to them; he seemed only surprised that Titus did not not always respond! Meromic came in from his hunting at dusk, the blood of some slain beast on his arms.

"Did you go far?" asked his father.

"We killed on the beach over by the Black Rocks; Louaven was there too."

"Ah. We must take our guest out hunting with us some day."

The boy looked at Titus with a broad grin; Fiom-

mar giggled softly: father was so unaccountable! Titus himself thought he ought to say something; he went over and fingered Meromic's short spear: "What were you after—deer?"

"Yes; but we've got wild cats in the woods to the east and boar as well; I like boar hunting."

"And wolves?"

"Oh, no!"—the boy looked horrified. "It would be geas for me to kill a wolf!"

"Geas——?"

"Well: not right. I couldn't—except in self-defence. I suppose you didn't know, but I'm a wolf myself—we all are; so it would be killing one's brother; the thing one mustn't do. Father's really the Wolf, you see, the head wolf; but I'm the next after him. And I think the other wolves—the wild ones—understand, because they don't come and take our sheep, like they do further along."

Titus was surprised, but he had got used to odd things among the barbarians.

After all, he never did go hunting with them, because very soon afterwards he was sent away again, this time to a strong town on the coast, where he found Quintus Velanius, who had had much the same experience. Crassus, of course, could not hold converse with an armed enemy nor exchange the hostages; his officers had to shift for themselves. Titus and Quintus both managed to escape in late winter, after heavy bribing of their guards and a boatman; a few more bribes, and they were back with the army. As soon as Cæsar's orders came, they were both sent off, first

to start the building of ships of war, then to raise oarsmen from the Province. They were very cautious this time, and took really adequate forces with them; but nothing happened. The fleet was assembled gradually, the legions were prepared and waiting for the word: a fine vengeance brewing against the Veneti!

Chapter 3: *Spring to Autumn,* 56 *B.C.*

" And where will they have their camp?
Says the Shan Van Vocht;
Where will they have their camp?
Says the Shan Van Vocht.
On the Curragh of Kildare,
The boys they will be there,
With their pikes in good repair,
Says the Shan Van Vocht.
To the Curragh of Kildare,
The boys they will repair,
And Lord Edward will be there,
Says the Shan Van Vocht."

The Shan Van Vocht.

THE chiefs of the Veneti had laid hands on the Roman officers on a sudden impulse, and now they had Cæsar against them, Cæsar who had conquered the Helvetii, Ariovistus and the Germans, the Belgic League! This would be a war like no other war; but still, the rest of the Aremorican cantons were bound by the strongest oaths, they knew that the freedom of the Veneti was theirs as well; and the towns were strong, the ships were many, the young fighters were keen and eager for battle; and they had the sea behind them, the tides and the storms, and Mananaun the Sea-god! Yet they tried to get what help they could before the war began in earnest. They did not expect it from the rest of Gaul; the Belgians were

broken and powerless, and the Aquitanians and strong tribes to the south-east had little more liking for them than for the Romans; only a few young men came to join them from other parts. But as soon as any ship could sail the Atlantic they sent for help to Britain; yet that must of necessity mean a long delay.

Kormiac was none too easy to deal with that winter; sometimes he was terribly anxious; he would wander about the place, full of forebodings, finding nothing right; then Fiommar and Meromic would keep out of his way, and the servants would follow him, trembling—no one's life was safe. Other times, when he had good news, or if he'd met with a lucky omen, he would be just as far the other way, certain of victory, ready to dare anything, defy the world; then his two children would ask him for things they wanted, and usually get them. This way Meromic had got his new sword, the sword he had longer for and imagined since he was a child, but never seen till one day a trading ship had brought it, and it was laid out on the top of the half-opened bales in the hall of Kormiac's house. Meromic came in and saw it, and said, "Oh, father!" and picked it up and thrust with it at an imaginary Roman. It had belonged to a chief somewhere in Spain, but he must have had it from the South; it was three feet of iron, with a wavy pattern on the blade, the hilt gold, lightly engraved with queer Eastern beasts that Meromic did not know, and the scabbard dyed leather, gold-tipped and gold-ringed. Kormiac had laughed, seeing his boy with the great sword; he paid for it in bar silver and two she-slaves. The sword had a Spanish name, meaning the gold lightning, but

Meromic gave it a name of his own: Ar-roud, the very red, "because," he said, "it will be very red soon!" Fiommar had got something out of that shipload too, a necklace of round crystals, as big as thrushes' eggs, threaded on copper wire. But that was the last time Kormiac was in such a good temper.

By the middle of April the Roman invasion had begun; the Veneti met the advancing legions with skirmishing and ambushes; when they were driven back they simply vanished among the rocks and heather of their own wild country. Cæsar did not dare to leave any of the big coast towns on his left flank, between him and his base. He had to lay siege to them one by one, and that took time, let alone that he got little good of it: the towns were often on islands or peaks of rock sticking out into the sea; they were impossible to starve, because food was always being sent them by ship, and when, after much labour, he had made a breach in the walls, the defenders would be sailing off from the other side. And the legionaries could never get accustomed to the tides, the piled waves racing in over those wide sands, to destroy their works or cut them off and drown them within sight of their comrades; and the Gauls took every advantage of this. So it went on through the spring and early summer, with no gain to the Romans, and the rest of Gaul beginning to wonder whether, after all, Cæsar was as invincible as they had thought.

Kormiac had sent word by the first ship that went to Britain; his messengers were to find Gandoc, tell him what straits the Veneti were in, and that any delay might be fatal. Meromic had written a letter; if

Gandoc could not read it, one of the Druids would be able. It said that, if he valued his marriage, he was to send at once, men and gold and iron, but men most of all, a ship-load of fighters with him at their head, to make war under the eyes of his bride! When he came, the letter said, he should be married at once: Fiommar would be ready the same day. The ship had sailed out on a fine morning, late in March, with the wolf head carved on its prow, and scarlet-dipped sails. Now it was almost May. Fiommar woke every morning, thinking perhaps she had lain her last night alone, and all day she would have an eye towards the beach, and every shout would startle her away from the loom down to the hall door to see if her husband was yet come. Wives and daughters of the chiefs from near by, her cousins often, came to visit her with presents of woven stuff and ornaments, all hoping that the wedding might chance to be the day they came; every week the war went on they looked up to her more: these Britons would mean so much! Her father was away at the Council a great deal of the time, and left her entirely mistress of the house; even he now treated her as if she was a grown woman, not a little girl; and she enjoyed it.

Meromic came back from time to time; the fighting was never far away, but the house was safe so long as the town of Rodec, south along the coast, was still defying the enemy. She had been desperately unhappy the first time he went; she could not sleep at night for thinking of him among the Roman swords. But she did not tell her father or her women what she was feeling, she had to be proud and light-hearted,

true battle-loving daughter of the Wolf. So it was on secret beaches, under lonely spikes of cliff, that she would kneel and pray aloud for him, and beat her forehead on the ground, and throw her jewels out to sea—anything to buy his safety from the jealous Gods!

He had come home for the first time, and for a little she thought he was not changed at all. He wanted to do all the old things, to go sailing and birds'-nesting with her, to tease the hounds and frighten the maids, and climb up into the rafters to catch bats; but besides that there was a new bit of him that she couldn't quite get at. "Did you kill any one?" she asked. He nodded. "What was it like?"

"I didn't think what it was like. I was afraid of being killed myself all the time."

"But doesn't it make you happy—fighting?"

"Well, yes, I expect so. But I don't like waiting; one's always waiting for hours first. I'm almost sure I like the rest, though."

"Tell me really."

"I can't—not you; girls don't understand."

"I would. Oh, Meromic, do! You always tell me things."

"But I'm a man now. Besides, it's all in the songs."

"The songs get made afterwards; and anyway it's not them I care about—it's you!" But he never really told her much; only, before he went back, he gave her something to keep safe for him: a head, very dried-up and smoke-blackened, with dark hair; she looked at it with some awe.

"Is it a Roman? Did you kill him yourself?"

"Yes, he's an officer; we cut him off from his men, so then I asked to be left to fight it out with him, and they did. There's only a short reach to the Roman sword, and I had Ar-roud; I wish you could have seen me!"

"Oh, so do I! But I'll keep it very safe, Meromic; I'll hang it in my own room."

The next time he came back she saw less of him, because he had two friends with him. One was his cousin Louaven, a rather older man, with reddish hair and a thick, short beard; he had bracelets of heavy bronze on both arms, and round his neck a flat bronze collar set with blue glass. The other was a newcomer, whom Kormiac welcomed very warmly: Molhir of the Carnutes who had not been in Aremorica for nearly four years, but had now come to fight with them against the Romans. He told them how things had gone in his country, how the Carnutic republic had been forced by Cæsar to accept a king, one Tasgetius, a man of noble family, but a friend to the Romans, and no friend to the great Order of Druids which centred in his land, and which had given education and a colouring of life to Molhir and many of his friends.

"Indeed," he had said, "it would hardly be safe for me to show myself in my own country now."

"All the more welcome to ours!" said Kormiac, and he had out his best wine.

Fiommar watched him from under her thick eyelashes; Molhir was a fine, tall young man, with the druid wreath round his helmet and the patterned bor-

der woven into his cloak, but otherwise dressed and armed like the rest. Looking at him regretfully, she wondered if she would like Gandoc any better when he came this time; it was his long, tangly beard, she decided: how could any girl bear being kissed by a scarecrow like that? But the Britons never shaved. She liked Molhir; even Louaven was not so bad; only no one had ever asked what her wishes were. But Gandoc: when he came—*when*—it was nearly two months since the ship had gone, and no answer. Perhaps he had been calling up his men from all over the country; perhaps he had been away on a journey when the messengers got to his house; perhaps—oh, but surely he must *want* to come! Even if I'm not beautiful, she said to herself and tossed a lock of hair over her shoulder, even if I'm not at all beautiful—and every one says I am—he can't dare to go against father! And there's my dowry (she thought of the locked chests all along the wall of her room), oh, he can't not be coming!

She listened again to the talk, because it was about this same man of hers: "They're due any day now," said her father; then Louaven: "We shall want them—every man; the Romans are bringing up new forces all the time." Molhir joined in: "One always despises them at first, but somehow they're not to be driven out once they've got their foot on to one's land. Perhaps you'll be luckier. I wish more of my people would see that the only way of getting them out of the whole country is to join with you." "I wish they would too," said Kormiac with a deep sigh, and Fiommar noticed suddenly how much whiter his

hair had grown of late; she wondered if he and Meromic were as certain as they sounded that Gandoc was coming; they had said nothing to her, but then why should they? If he didn't come—they mightn't be able to beat the Romans, they might get beaten themselves, they, the Veneti, the free Cantons! He must come! Oh, she thought, if only he'd come and get killed, then I shouldn't ever have to go away to Britain or leave father and Meromic; perhaps I should have a baby, but I wouldn't mind that—I think I should like it—if only I hadn't got to have it among strangers; if it was a boy . . . she lost herself among speculations. The party at the table broke up.

* * * * *

Louaven stood on the parapet of the town wall of Rodec, leaning on his spear and looking inland; his leather tunic blew against his knees and he shivered a little, but he knew it would be hot enough after the sun had risen an hour or two. He peered down, screwing up his eyes and trying hard to see across those two miles to the mainland. The walls and roofs and doors of Rodec, grey and brown and white, were piled and heaped up the sides of a great rock that rose full in the middle of western-facing Rodec bay. At high tide it was an island with a wide stretch of tumbling waves between it and the coast; sometimes in winter it was an island for days together. But always in fair weather there was a safe three hours when the tide was out and one could cross to it along a causeway of stone blocks, with wagon ruts worn in the top and sea-weed and barnacles growing along

the sides. It was low tide now, and a legion camped on the shore opposite.

The light grew and grew till the Roman camp fires were yellow smears instead of stars. He turned to the inner side of the wall where two or three sleepers lay, wrapped in thick bear skins, and called softly, "Meromic!" Meromic woke, rubbed his eyes, and was on his feet with a jump and up on to the wall beside Louaven. They looked out together, whispering; presently the sun rose above the line of the downs, and threw long shadows and clear light on to all the tangled walls of Rodec; Meromic drew Ar-roud and held it high over his head for the blessing of Lugh. There was little to be seen clearly, but it was certain there was some movement forward in the camp. Louaven frowned: the tide was still far out, a dancing line along the sand, and the Romans had time if they chose to use it; he wished they could attack themselves, but the garrison of Rodec was not strong enough to go out against a whole legion.

About half-way between the causeway and the waves there was a little group of rocks with pools among them, flat, dazzling mirrors to the sun; Meromic blinked at them, considering something; then he touched Louaven on the arm: "I've a plan."

For some minutes they talked together; at last Louaven nodded: "Very well. But you will be careful, Meromic? Whatever happens, don't leave yourself too late; if a few get past with you, we'll be there to meet them! You're sure you know your way?"

"Oh yes; and I can jump, but they'll be heavy-armed, they won't be able. Even if it's not a whole cohort, it'll put the others off."

He took off his cloak and armour, left Ar-roud for his cousin to take care of, and made all his preparations; from the far side of the island he set sail alone in a little boat of stretched leather, and landed an hour later three miles down the coast.

About high tide, the Legate heard that a fisher-boy had something to tell him: the boy was brought before him, a long-legged thing with tar on his face, dressed in a torn grey shirt, and an old sheep-skin; he twisted his hands together and said he wanted money. The Legate gave him money and spoke to him gently; he offered to guide the Romans into Rodec by a new way that the garrison would never be guarding; he pointed it out.

"But the quicksands?"

"I go round them: it's the place I used to dig sand-eels for bait. The tide would be right at dusk to-day."

"The tide will have turned by then, and the quicksands will be spreading; better wait a day or two till it's at its lowest in the evening."

"As you like, sir, but I warn you one thing, it should be done at once if it's to be done at all: they say there's two thousand men waiting up north in Lugdenn for the word to march."

The fisher-boy wept that he was betraying his country, and was promised more gold if he guided them safely to Rodec. The Legate decided to feign

an attack along the causeway that evening; this would keep all the garrison busy there, while one cohort went round by the new way, got into the town, and fell on the Gauls from behind.

Meromic loved being a fisher-boy and speaking with a country accent and pretending not to understand when the officers talked Latin, and he had the money tied into a knot in his shirt. But now—he had one eye on the tide and quickened his pace a little: this would be dangerous. The young tribune beside him fingered his silky, black moustache, and passed down word that the men were to follow him three deep; they were a picked cohort of veterans, steady, reliable men, who were always chosen for a piece of special work like this. Meromic glanced over his shoulder at the battle on the causeway, but could make out very little: the sunset was glowing orange behind the black mass of Rodec: he felt the cool, firm sand underfoot. Then he splashed through the first of the pools, and his toes sunk slightly in the bottom. He could hear from the changing tone of the waves that the tide was beginning to come in quicker; he hurried along the rocks, the tribune could hardly keep up with him. His bare feet were steady as he jumped or clung, but the Roman soldiers with their nailed boots were slipping all the time. His heart throbbed so that he could hardly think of anything else, but he went on calmly; he got to the end of the chain of rocks, with a hundred yards or so of sand between him and the foot of Rodec crags. He looked back; the last of the cohort were getting among the pools now; there was a splash and

a cry from behind: the tribune looked back too, frowning: they must make no noise or they would be heard from the town!

Then Meromic took a breath, leapt and ran. He heard a shout, and feet after him, then the whirr of a javelin; he ducked his head and ran harder; he felt the sand yielding like sand in a dream, and saw the film of damp over it. He was nearly at the far rocks: suddenly it yielded altogether, he was in up to his knees, first one leg, then the other; he made a plunge forward, hoping to drag out on to firm ground, but he only felt it give again. The sea roared in his ears as each wave ran foaming nearer. And Rodec was so close! Oh, if only—a splash on the wet beside him, a black streak, a rope! He grabbed and had it. Louaven called: he twisted it under his arms as it pulled taut; the sand sucked at his knees and ankles; the rope dragged him forward in jerks on his face, he choked on a mouthful of salt water. He tugged at a bunch of sea-weed, felt hard stone, and then Louaven's strong hands under his armpits, hoisting him up; he fell flat on the rock with his arms out, panting. After a minute or two Louaven touched his shoulder: "Look." He sat up and looked: in the gathering dusk the wave crests showed white, the sand greyish; and on that further group of rocks the little, scrambling, troubled figures, the glint of armour. "And the men who were after me?" Louaven pointed; there was something dark red half buried in the sand, a helmet crest. As he watched, two of the men on the rocks tried to run back towards the shore; they seemed to get shorter and shorter, they

waved their arms. . . . Meromic gave a little gasp; he heard the oncoming waves, the splash and rush on the sand, sea-gulls crying, and through it all the confused voices of the cohort. The waves were almost up to the rock now; some of the men started singing. And the two Gauls went back into Rodec.

That saved the town for a month or so; the Legate waited till Cæsar could come himself to deal with the barbarians. And they hoped every day that their British allies would be over; they were nearly worn out themselves. Meromic got home again about midsummer, saying to himself that his brother-in-law would surely be there by now. He rode up to the house and shouted in the courtyard, as he always did. But no one ran out to hold his stirrup and bid him welcome. He dismounted and tied his horse to the ring in the wall, pushed open the door, and walked into the hall. He very nearly fell over Fiommar; she was lying on the floor, her hair and hands full of rushes, her dress torn half off her shoulders; she was so still that he was frightened. He pulled her up and found she was only too exhausted to move; her eyes were swollen and red, her hot face sticky with tears like a child's.

"Fiommar! What's the matter? Tell me, quick!"

She answered low: "Gandoc. He's not coming."

Meromic let her go suddenly, and she fell back limp to the floor; he sat down himself, hearing his horse fidget and stamp in the sun outside; at last he spoke: "When did you hear?"

Fiommar, still on the ground, lifted her head a little "This morning."

"But why?" She only answered with more tears. "Fiommar, you must tell me! Come, get up; it's no fault of yours."

"Oh, don't you think so?" She got to her knees.

"No, of course not."

"Father did. Well, I'll tell you. The ship came in, but—but—oh, Meromic, there are just a few swords and some bar iron, but no men, nothing else, only a message—not even a letter!—to say he was sorry, but he had his own fighting to do in Britain and couldn't send men or come till it was over, but he was sure we'd win, and then——"

"What? Go on!"

"Only that father wasn't to trouble to keep me for him. I wish I was dead!"

"Don't, don't, poor sweetheart! What did father do? Where is he?"

"He's at the Council. He got angry all over—you know—and then he said it was all my fault, and he beat me with a dog-whip till I fell down."

"Oh, God, I'd have stopped that! It was none of your doing: he chose Gandoc himself."

"That's what I thought. But I ought to have made him love me, then he'd have come. But I never tried."

"I don't know; it must be hard being a woman. Did anything else happen?"

"No. Only every one thinks like father, even my own women. But that doesn't matter. What will you do without them?"

"More than I can tell; we wanted them so badly. God, if I could find that man I'd have his eyes out!"

And he began walking about the room, kicking up the rushes and fingering the hilt of Ar-roud.

Kormiac the Wolf came back from the Council that evening, and they sat late over the supper table; Louaven had heard the news and rode over about sunset, and the three talked it all out: the way the Romans were gradually wearing them down, the loss of material that could not be replaced, and how their trade with the far North had dwindled to nothing now the young men were all at the war. Kormiac was very gloomy; he could see nothing ahead and wished with all his heart he had never touched those officers. Louaven had heard rumours that the Roman fleet was nearly ready. "But a sea-fight!" said Meromic. "We couldn't ask anything better. They'll not beat us at our own game, whatever happens on land!" His cousin was not so hopeful, but still there were possibilities about it. The lamps were burnt out when they rose from their talk, but nothing was really settled.

Meromic kissed his father's hand and went off to his room. Suddenly he thought he would see if Fiommar was asleep, and pushed the curtain aside; she saw him and gave a little eager cry: "Oh, Meromic, what's going to happen?"

He shook his head: "Nothing's certain," and sat down on the bed beside her; she covered his shoulders with a blanket. "You're cold!" he said, feeling her thin, soft arms against his cheek.

She didn't answer, but after a minute or two began talking to him in a whisper: "After the war, we'll run away together and find an island all by itself some-

where, and make a house out of stones, and thatch it with whin, and have a fire in the middle and heaps of fern to lie on and tell stories; and you'll be king there and I'll be queen—oh, I can't go on! It's your turn, Meromic."

He took it up: "And we'll be able to be any beasts we like. I shall be the Wolf, of course, and you can be a sea-gull—that's what you like, isn't it, Fiommar? —and I'll catch deer and carry them off over my back, and you must dive for fish . . ." he hesitated and stopped. "I can't go on either. It's no good. Perhaps there won't be any after the war."

"Can't you see it?"

"No."

"Nor can I—now."

"I'd like to kill that man five different ways and smash his house to bits and take his cattle! I'd burn him on a damp fire, and I'd hang him on a tree for the crows to get at, and——"

"Oh don't, what's the use? Oh, Meromic, it's all too awful!" She started crying again, and then he did too, though he tried hard to stop himself. After that he thought he was tired enough to go to sleep at once, but he couldn't; he lay awake, wondering how it would all end, wishing it weren't true, and then the birds began outside, and then it got light. And at last he jumped up and shook himself, and went off to the beach and had a long swim; that was the first time in his life he'd not slept for a whole night.

Rodec fell late in July; Cæsar had pushed out long walls to keep the tide back, and the defences of the town were not strong enough to stand against his siege

engines. Most of the garrison escaped safely by sea, Meromic with a slight wound in his leg which he was very proud of; he went home and found the old men and the women hurrying about with loads of turf to make thick walls round the house; he told them it was no use trying to defend it, but neither his father nor his sister would go. While he was arguing with them, news came that the Roman fleet had been sighted coming north under full sail. He was overjoyed at this: "There'll be no need to defend the house! We've got them this time! Oh, they can't know—they wouldn't walk blindfold into the trap! My God, we'll have them clear out of the country by the end of the month!" He gave a wild yell that made every one turn round and stare at him as he leapt into the air, waving Ar-roud!

Even his father felt an enormous relief; he wondered at first if it were really possible, but another message confirmed the first, and then Louaven and Molhir came hurrying up to the house, shouting to their men, laughing, singing scraps of songs, their bright eyes full of excitement and confidence. Kormiac looked at his son with a heightened colour: the end was in sight, they had beaten Cæsar if they won this battle, and how could they not win it? From all accounts there were not more than a hundred ships in the Roman fleet and these for the most part small, light things, with no spread of sail, but rowed by slaves or pressed men from the Province. While all the time their own fleet lay waiting in the sheltered coves of the bay five miles to the north: big, fine, seagoing beauties! Their towering prows had often

faced the Atlantic waves, and surely they were a match for these Roman galleys! Two hundred there were, and more, with all the youth and strength of the Veneti, the best of the Cantons, hurrying aboard, good sailors and good fighters, knowing their own sea, its winds and tides and rocks—the Romans were mad!

Kormiac's five ships were being got ready on the beach below the house; all had the wolf-head crest on sails and prow; three of them were big trading ships, decked over with pine planks, with room for over a hundred fighting men, as well as the sailors. Louaven was to have one, Kormiac's younger brother the second, and Meromic the third; he would take Molhir, who knew nothing about sea-fighting, with him. The other two ships were smaller, one a sailing-ship, and one a little open-decked boat with rowers instead of sails; this was commanded by a young vassal chief of Kormiac's, and they all laughed at him for having nothing better. Under the hot sun the new-tarred planks dripped on to the sand; fresh cordage was put on to the sails wherever it was needed and the leather was looked over carefully for weak places; arms were stored in the holds, and the men assembled on the beach, each with food enough for a day or two.

Up at the house, Fiommar was helping Meromic to arm; he had bathed in hot water and combed his hair, and put on a clean linen shirt; for a sea-fight he would not wear heavy armour or anything on his feet. But he had an iron helmet with a flat peak over his neck behind; the open jaws of the Wolf in bronze and gold rose above it; his coat was leather, strengthened with bronze plates on the shoulders, and he wore the

gold-hilted Ar-roud at his right side, and a dagger at his left. Fiommar burnished every gold bracelet and ring he had, and for luck she put an arm-ring of hers on to his wrist; last of all came his great golden necklace. She clasped her hands, looking him up and down, and then suddenly went on her knees in front of him, crying, "Oh, you're the Pride of the Islands now!"

He laughed and kissed her, then took up his shield, saying, "See you've a feast ready for us when we come home!" But yet he was just a little anxious; on the way down to the beach with Molhir he said, "If only we were leaving any one behind us! If this doesn't go as it should, we've no one to fall back on, and they'd be defenceless at home."

"Yes," said Molhir, "the Britons would have been right for that."

Meromic nodded and pulled up a big parsley plant from the side of the track, and began twisting the stem.

"I know," said Molhir, noticing. "If that was only him!"

The men cheered them as they came in sight, and shouted, "Up, the Wolf!" The tide was rising and two of the ships were afloat already. It took a little time hoisting the sails, but soon they were swelling and moving slowly out as they felt the land-wind behind them. Kormiac had ridden down, and sat silently on his horse, watching them away; all at once Fiommar came running, her arms full of flowers, yellow and red and white, and jumped into her own little boat, rowed after them and caught them up, and

threw bunches inboard with both hands. The men reached out to catch the flowers, and wreathed them on the Wolf's head and crowned themselves, till they got out of the lee of the cliffs, and the sails filled, they went on faster, and Fiommar and her boat were left behind, bobbing in the petal-strewn wake. She and her father waited on the beach till the five ships were out of sight behind the islands; then they turned, and he went off to the Council-house, and she went home, shivering a little and silent, thinking of the Roman camp that was not so far off round the bay.

* * * * *

The Venetan fleet was having the best of it all across the two miles of strongly-running waves; the Roman galleys could only save themselves by dodging quickly, with all hands set to row, while the Gallic ships were slowly coming about, shifting their great leather sails, turning like islands. The scarlet flag on the Roman admiral's galley flitted about like a hunted deer with Kormiac's three wolf ships chasing it. Meromic stood on the high prow of the foremost, with drawn sword, ready to leap and board as soon as they came near enough; he could see the admiral in his purple cloak on the deck of the galley in front of him, and he thought: there! there! oh, if only it could be me who killed him! and vowed all manner of things if he could accomplish it. But it was an uncertain day; the wind was gusty, sometimes in one quarter, sometimes veering half round to another, and then, for minutes at a time, dying away to nothing.

Suddenly the galley stopped dead, and spun round to meet them with a churning of oars; Meromic

shouted back to his steersman, they ran up on the landward side of the galley, closed and boarded. For five minutes it was wild hand-to-hand fighting; Meromic hardly knew what he was doing; he felt the shock of thrown darts and then the weight of them on his shield; he was alone for a moment on a slippery deck, facing his enemies, then his men were beside him, rushing on with him. He struck and struck against locked shields, he only saw the circle round him, swords and spears and faces, the purple cloak was lost. Then there was a great cry from his own ship, Molhir calling him to come back quick! He ran to the side, jumped for a hand, and all at once was up where he could see: this was why the galley had turned! They had hooked a sickle at the end of a long pole on to the halyard that held up his great main sail; he shouted to grapple and stick to the galley, not let her pull away! But it was too late; the galley was backing with all her oars. He sprang at the mast and climbed, straining to be in time and get the blade unhooked!

But as he climbed it cut and the sail fell, sweeping him off on to the deck; he was pinned on his back between huge folds of leather, with his right arm under the yard; he screamed with pain and fright, felt the deck tip under him and a wave wash up salt over his face. For a minute he lay choking in the dark, tugging to get his arm free, then the yard shifted a little, he got it out with a wrench that made him scream again and crawled into daylight. He saw at once what had happened: the ship was half over on to to her side, the waves were sweeping across her, and she was at the mercy of the galley. As he got to his

knees he was knocked over again by a rush of Roman soldiers; he saw his men surrendering right and left, and shouted at them furiously; a soldier turned on him with dripping steel, and then he realized with terror that his right arm was useless. Trying to draw his own sword, he stumbled back, tripped on the low rail of the ship, and was head over heels in the water, gasping and spluttering and striking out away into the open. On the slope of a wave he clutched a floating spar, and held on to it with his left hand, biting his lip as the salt water stung his torn right shoulder.

From there he could see the struggle on his own deck and, when he was lifted on a wave crest, the whole wide stretch of battle. What had happened to him had happened to half the Venetan fleet; the rest were turning in confusion to fly. He hardly understood at first; he had his eyes mostly on his own ship; once he saw Molhir fighting bareheaded at the stern, but a wave rising between them hid him for a moment, and after that he had disappeared. One of his men passed him, swimming feebly; he called out to ask how things were going; the man turned his head: "They're all over us; I nearly——" and then blood poured out of his mouth, his eyelids flickered, and he sank. Then Meromic knew the Romans had won the battle; he thought sickly of his home, his father, his sister; he wondered if they would try to defend the house; he thought of all he ought to have done, he and the others: they should have had rowers, of course, rowers . . . and bowmen. . . . His head was whirling, the sky swung up and down, he felt himself falling sideways through the water and hugged the spar, try-

ing to keep his face above the waves. All at once he noticed that the sea was flattening out, he was being buffeted less by the spray: the wind had dropped again. The landward drift of the current was pulling at him, away and away from the battle; he let himself go to it.

The Roman army, camped on the cliffs, could see all that was going on in the bay; Cæsar was there himself and had watched the disastrous beginning of the fight changed in a moment to victory. From that height the bay seemed only rippled, with little, coloured ships sliding across it; the sounds were mostly blown away; the battling men were less real than the butterflies on the thick heather by Cæsar's feet; but yet he knew all they were suffering, he felt himself every change in the day from morning to sundown. After the first surprise and alarm he saw impatiently how the Venetan ships were escaping, scudding ahead of the galleys that chased them; they would be all safe away by nightfall, hiding in a hundred creeks and inlets, and the battle must be fought again! But then suddenly, like a word from the Gods, the calm had fallen, and Cæsar knew his star was with him yet. The sailing ships lay helpless, dispersed half over the bay; the galleys could take their time, row up to them, board and capture them one by one. It was all over by sunset; here, as everywhere, Cæsar was the conqueror.

The tide swept in and in through the mouth of the bay, carrying with it wreckage, masts, planks, oars, tangles of rope and sail, bodies of Gaul and Roman, and drifting with them Meromic and his spar. He had been in the water hours now, numb, bleeding

hours, with the coast-line only ever so little changed each time he looked up at it. At first he had felt his leather coat dragging at him, but he had managed to slip it off and fasten his sword-belt again, while he was still strong enough; it sank at once. Sometimes he had swum a little, but mostly he had just rested on his spar, wondering how long it would be before he got too weak to hold on to it; the sun had scorched his head at the beginning, but later he had not felt it. After a long space of drifting he raised his head and saw the dark shape of land high and near on his right; he breathed deeply, let go the spar, and started swimming across the current. For all his efforts, it had almost carried him past when suddenly he felt bottom; he waded in, pulled himself up above high-tide mark, and lay flat, thinking dizzily how solid the ground was. Above him the evening sky was pale with stars; he stared at them, trying to get clear in his head whether he was east or south of the bay; before he could be certain, they all went black; he spent that night cold on the sand, half asleep, half fainting, but still free, free and in his own country.

He woke in the morning very thirsty, and got to his feet, clinging to a rock and looking out to sea; he seemed to know this beach and yet he couldn't be sure—that slope?—that outline of crag—where? He went on, and all at once heard a trickle of fresh water and turned eagerly towards it; and there was the spring and the rowan tree, everything fell into its place: he was on Crabland all the time. He drank deep at the spring, and sat down beside it; he felt so strong at first, strong enough to climb up and look

round for any help. He saw the empty bay, the wreckage of ships and hopes; he knew well how far it was from here to the mainland: he could never swim it now with this aching, bleeding arm that he was hardly able to move. He grew thirsty again and went back to the spring; watching the water sliding along over the dark green weeds, hearing its changing voice, he did not think, did not hope, did not dream; before he had made up his mind about anything, it was evening again . . . and night . . . and morning; he would never leave Crabland now, he would die here quietly, he would be done with pain and hunger, it would all go out, the soft withdrawal of a long tide.

Chapter 4: *Autumn*, 56 *B.C.*

> " Do not make a great keening
> For the graves that are dug to-morrow."
>
> *Yeats.*

IT was the evening of the second day; he was lying on the grass by the spring, the fingers of his left hand just touching the surface of the water; his right arm had been bleeding again and he was half asleep, very weak, and giddy when he lifted his head. Every time he opened his eyes a long bit of the day had passed; the sun was still on the top of the little crag when he had looked up last; he could not have slept for more than an hour or so, but yet when he awoke it was evening, the fairy evening on Crabland. And the fairy of the spring was standing on the opposite side of the trickle, looking out to sea, just as he had always thought of her, tall and slender and young, with loose hair; he could not raise himself to do her homage, but she turned her head towards him; their eyes met, she was Fiommar after all.

Quickly and skilfully she bound up his arm with the torn hem of her dress; he told her what had happened, ending up with: " What are you doing here, Fiommar? "

She hesitated: " Well, I've always told you things, after all; I'm come here to kill myself."

He caught her hands, pulled her over on to the top

of him, kissed her furiously: "Fiommar, why, why?"

She loosed herself gently: "That'll mean telling you everything. Meromic, are you hungry?"

"I've not had food for two days."

"Oh, if I'd only known I'd find you! But wait, I'll see——"

She ran down to the beach, to her boat; there was a hard crust of bread under the seat, left over from some earlier fishing expedition and half soaked with sea water, and a piece of cheese; she brought them, her brother ate hungrily and sat up: "Now, tell me everything!"

"You know the battle was lost. I think five ships alone came to land, with most of the crews killed; I've been helping with the wounded since then. That must be the end, mustn't it? Look, Meromic, look round the bay: north and south and east the Romans are camped along the cliffs; there's no place we can call our own, no place to go on living in, no place to die in except this island of ours."

"But, Fiommar—surely—where's father?"

"Dear, he's dead. The Roman commander decreed the death of all the Council; they were taken by armed men in the Council-house; our father is dead by the Roman axes. You are the Wolf now."

"Father dead! And all in two days. But you, dear sister, little sister, is there no kinsman to take you—one of the uncles?"

"It's the same everywhere; they're flying or dead; you don't think these Romans respect a Druid, do you? Our cousins: I don't know what's come to them all; I don't even care. Life's come to a turning-place—I

can't look back. They say Molhir escaped; he may have. But I had no time to lose to-day; their soldiers were coming. I knew at least I didn't want to be taken alive. I took my knife and my boat, and rowed out here. I never thought I'd see you again."

"Are we to die together, then?"

"I don't see why you must, Meromic. Only: what will you do? Even if you could get round out of the bay and past their camps, there's no army left, no town, no ships; all the allies are surrendering and, God knows, I don't blame them: it's all too much to bear."

"I might try it, all the same, if my arm weren't hurt; but this boat of yours wouldn't stand the waves outside. If only you'd brought a big one! I suppose they'd all gone, though. Well, it can't be helped. But I couldn't swim again, I know. You're sure they're all round the bay?"

"Yes. You'd have to give yourself up. Only—they say—it's because of our having imprisoned their officers——"

"Well—what?"

"The Romans are going to sell every one who surrenders—sell them as slaves."

"That looks like my dying too. Fiommar, what is it, death? Shall we go to the Far Isle? Or shall we stay here, ghosts along the beaches? Or is it all a lie and there's nothing afterwards?"

Fiommar shook her head: "I don't know. Only I'm quite sure it'll be better for me than living as a slave, even if it's black sleep. But you're a man: life may hold something for you still; and besides, you're

the last of us left, the only hope for the name of the Wolf to go on. Meromic, I think you should surrender."

He twisted about on the grass, unable to make up his mind; in spite of the wound, he still felt intensely alive, conscious of his strong, unused body. He rubbed his hand over the yet warm surface of the rock, which crumbled away in powder, he picked up a pebble between his toes. No, the truth was that he didn't want to die. But wasn't part of this exquisite life-feeling to be free, able to do what one liked with those willing limbs? And glory: wasn't that all part of it too —would he care to go on if his nation was broken and scattered, if no one minded when they heard he was a man of the Veneti? And mustn't it be terrible being a slave, the Pride of the Islands no more? Only there was something in oneself that went on through it all, something that would make even suffering more worth while than death. And the waves were so beautiful, so regular, and the falling dusk infinitely tender: he could not leave it yet!

Fiommar watched his face reflecting the thought; she understood. But her own mind was made up; she had passed the time when one could hope. "Wait till to-morrow morning," she said.

"Very well; you'll wait too?"

"Surely."

But food, he must have food; she went light-foot over the crest of the ridge to where in a hollow the wild goats were settling to sleep; here she drew her knife and slid on her face over the noiseless turf. She caught and killed a kid, and brought it back over her

shoulder, then made a fire by rubbing two dry sticks together, with tinder from an old gull's nest. The fire crackled up between two rocks; she knelt beside it, roasting the meat on a green stick of tamarisk; the flames flickered over her brother's face and neck, and she felt it would be wrong for him to die. They ate almost in silence, she not wanting to disturb the balance of her mind, he feeling that when there was only bad news to be got, it was better to ask no questions. Then she lay down with both hands under her cheek and her hair loose in the moonlight, and she slept all night. He wandered about the island, stumbling down illusive slopes, rousing the birds or the goats, coming out of tangled bushes on to the edge of the cliff, with the calm, solid-looking sea—the sea that had betrayed them—stretching away below. But at last, after moon-set, he had come back, not thinking to sleep, but slept, and woke to see Fiommar cutting up the kid to roast for him again. For a moment, even, he had forgotten how things were, he only thought how lovely to be alone with Fiommar, in the morning, on Crabland, the plan of their childhood coming true! Then he remembered.

They went down together to the beach, Fiommar put the sail ready for him to hoist, and tied the rope in an easy knot that he could loosen with one hand; she was taking it for granted now that he was going back, and he himself thought no more of dying. Then she said, "I want to lie out on the high ridge here; if I get the turfs up now, will you throw them over me?" They prised them up with pointed sticks and his sword; the earth was brown and damp and

pleasant-smelling under the layer of roots. It was soon done. They sat down on the pile; from that height they could see quite plainly how the currents were setting for miles all round them, and the fringe of foam on the rocks, pieces of drifting wreckage, cloud shadows sweeping purple over the flecked blue, and then, on the mainland, here and there, a wisp of smoke; their own house was just visible to long practised eyes, a tiny gleam of sunshine on white walls. Fiommar drew her knife. Meromic caught her to him, with his left arm, sobbing, "Don't, don't!" She pulled his head down on to her breast and held him tight, stroking his hair and singing:

"Good-bye, my darling,
Oh good-bye, my brother!
Husband or child would
Be only another.
Good-bye the islands,
The land that I love,
Good-bye my house with
It's grey roof above!
Good-bye the hearthstone,
The fire, the smoke,
Good-bye for ever
My desolate folk!
Good-bye the sun
And the wind and the rain!
When I am dead
I shall come back again.
Now death is chosen
The dying is nought;
Honour's un-ending
But sorrow is short.

I must make ready,
For soon I shall see
Father and friends who
Are waiting for me! "

Meromic, with his eyes shut, warm against his sister's soft heart-beating, felt her suddenly quiver all over; he looked up; she smiled at him with all the colour ebbing out of her cheeks; her hands fluttered for a moment over his face; she fell on her side. From the slope below, the wild goats bleated faintly together; a tuft of thistle-down blew across Fiommar's hair; she seemed to sink lower into the turf. He bent over her, looking at her closely; he had never seen before just how her lip crooked up at the corner, nor how the fine downy hairs joined her eyebrows in the middle: well, he would remember. He picked up her hand where it lay, palm upward on the grass; but it was heavy, it dropped from the wrist; he shivered: this was not his sister. He put his arm under to drag her over to her place, and he felt the hilt of the knife driven in by a firm hand; the blood was sticky on her dress, he folded it under her; at first he could not make her lie straight, she was all tumbled by the fall, but at last he got her lying along with her arms at her sides and her hair over her shoulders, like a princess in a fairy-tale. Slowly he brought the turfs from the pile; he laid them on, covering her face last; it was like a game—surely she must jump up soon and scatter them, the turfs they had cut together! But the sun shone, the gulls tossed above them in the high air, the sea washed up and down the beach below, and there was

earth on her hair, on her cheeks, on her eyelids. . . .

Now when he had laid down the last turfs it was past noon, and the wind was not very strong; so it seemed time to go. He went first to the spring and stood there, listening to the splashy drip, as he had done a hundred times before; then he took the gold rings off his fingers and the gold bracelets off his arms, and dropped them on to the moss; the necklace too, he laid off and left there, for whatever God or man should find it; he made patterns, arranging and re-arranging them, trying to think of nothing else. But he had to go down to the beach; he waded out to the boat and untied the rope with the easy knot, hardly able to believe that those quick hands of his sister's were already helpless. There was a slight swell; he poled the boat out past the rocks, and set the sail as well as he could.

For the first hour he could still see the raised mound on the high ridge of Crabland, and all his thoughts were with it. But, after that, his interest turned to the nearing shore, first the smoke of burnt houses where he had danced and feasted in old days, then the familiar outlines of field and heath destroyed by the square lines of the Roman camps, then moving figures on the shore. He had to choose a landing-place, and chose the furthest; it would be unbearable to land this time at his own cove, and while he was in the boat he was yet unconquered. The far beach was almost empty; he knew the shelving sands well of old; now he was rocking among the small, light-crested waves, he let down the sail. The little boat grounded; he slipped out, half capsizing her, drew his sword left-handed, and jabbed a narrow slit through the leather

bottom; the sea-water soaked in; Fiommar's boat would be drawn out with the tide and sink in a little, and never have a Roman hand laid on her.

He stood on the wet, hard sand, pressing into it with his toes, frightfully conscious of this last time, trying to get a picture into his mind to take away with him wherever he might go, holding on to every detail: the sea-weed blown across the beach, full of white sand-hoppers; a rock new fallen from the cliff, with still a tuft of samphire clinging to it, waiting to be knocked off by the next storm; a star-fish left high and dry by the tide, feebly lifting its arms—he threw it back into the water, but it was only washed up again; a sea-gull sweeping, curiously, over the half-sunken boat: one more look out to sea, where Crabland was hidden behind the other islands, his secret for all time. Then, taking a deep breath, he turned and walked up the beach.

Two or three legionaries were at work, mending a boat, under the edge of the cliff; they did not notice him; he went on. The yellow vetches had been crushed under enemy feet: now it was his turn. He wanted to find an officer. There was a handful of men marching quickly towards him along the track in the heather, a centurion at their head; Meromic waited, standing very still, till they were level with him, and gathered up his courage and his best Latin accent: "I want to surrender myself." The centurion glowered at him: "Go up to the camp; I've no time to waste. Get on, men!" And Meromic was left with his effort wasted, and a curious feeling of disappointment, partly that it was all to be done again, partly that here,

in his own land, no one knew that he had any importance.

Would it, after all, be possible to escape? He looked inland and up: there was a new sky-line of earth-work and palisade. Even if he could get past them—what? His wound hurt him; he was tired already; there was no telling how far off the nearest of the flying army might be, or whether they would ever fight again. He could see the helmets of the Roman sentries going up and down, up and down: it was hopeless.

He went on towards the camp, following the heather track carefully, not cutting corners, nor stepping over stones where he might go round. Once in sight, he felt oddly shy and hesitated at the corner, pulling the dry dodder out of the whins with his left hand. Two officers came towards him, talking; he caught the eye of one of them.

"What are you doing?"

"I've come to give myself up."

"Oh, very well."

He offered the gold-hilted sword, Ar-roud, and looked away when the Roman took it.

"You've hurt your arm?"

"Yes, I was on a ship."

"Ah. You'd better come along to the tents. What's your name?"

"Meromic, son of Kormiac."

The Roman looked a little impressed: that was something; and a little sorry for him too. "I suppose you know your father's been executed as one of the Council?"

"I did know."

"It had to be done. Now, follow me." The officers turned off towards the camp, Meromic with them, glad in a way to have taken the final step.

* * * * *

A week later the weather had turned chilly; those who could were crouching under the shelter of the turf wall; Meromic leaned back against it, trying to shift the chains a little where they had already scraped the skin off his ankles. From time to time the crowd of prisoners would be swept by some rumour of what was going to happen to them. The auctioneer's table and chair, his clerks with their ink-pots and unrolled accounts, and the ring of buyers, were all in the centre of the field. It was almost impossible to hear what was going on, and every ten, as they were bought, were taken off to the other side. But there were a few children, and some of the Gallic auxiliaries could be questioned. It appeared that there were five or six dealers from the South, who were buying in the best to take away; of the rest, some were going to the soldiers, some to the emigrants—a hard fate, that, to have to work as a slave on your own land for the conqueror!

Another batch of ten were being called up; Meromic got to his feet; they trailed across the mud, dragging their chains; some of them were quite badly wounded, one fell down and was sick, but he was prodded on and up to the table, with his face green. Some one arranged them, hastily pushing Meromic in front, where he stood very straight and glared at the dealers. One of them started the bidding, it went up; he tried vainly to see where the voices came from; it

hung for a moment, the hammer fell once, a new voice took it up, the auctioneer turned respectfully; it was the officer he had surrendered to who pushed forward and looked him up and down—obviously the attraction. One of the dealers was bidding again, then the officer—if only it could be him! For a moment the sun came out, a watery gleam on the big, crowded field, a burnish on the armour, a new tone of gold in Meromic's hair; the dealer saw him in his mind's eye, looking just like that on a dull day in the market, he sent the bidding up again. The officer shook his head and stepped aside, the hammer fell, and Meromic choked back tears of disappointment.

The dealer fussed after his group, and at once sold off about half of them, singly, to soldiers or colonists. The rest were put into a barn for the night; the chains —government property—were taken off, and new ones fitted on. Meromic saw no one he knew, no one of his own sort; they were men-at-arms, cottagers, many of them not even freeborn: but what difference did that make now? There was a fire in the middle of the barn which lighted it up when the door was shut; at the other end a few women huddled together, one of them moaning over and over again on the same low, tearing note. A centurion came in and bargained for three or four strong workers, then put his brand into the fire to heat, chatting, meanwhile, with the dealer, and scratching his head. The men he had bought were thrown on the ground, struggling, and Meromic watched, horrified, as the brand was pressed down and held; the fourth man was difficult to keep still, and they wanted help. "Here, you!" the centurion

called to Meromic, "you look a tough lad; come and sit on his legs!" "No!" said he indignantly, not moving. They found some one else, but when the branding was over, all but the smell of singed flesh, the dealer came up to him with a whip. Meromic crouched, turning his hurt arm and shoulder to the floor; for a moment he remembered being a tiny boy at school, and the white-robed Druids; but they never hurt much, they were too old; this did hurt—the dealer knew all about screening wounds, and acted accordingly.

Seeing the officer talking to his master the next morning, he hoped he was going to change hands, as they came near he was almost sure of it. But no: the dealer wanted too much for him, nearly half what a pack pony would cost. A few kind words to him, a whisper to the dealer that he just caught, warning him that this particular sort of barbarian was given to suicide, and the officer was gone.

South-east they went, about sixty of them, all chained together, the dealer and his men riding beside them and forcing the pace with words and whip: they must try and be early in the market, soon it would be flooded with Gauls. At first the country was scarred with war, but by the end of the first week they were out of it. He tried to make friends with the men he was chained to, but it was not much use; they were deadened and crushed and could speak of nothing but the road, dust or rain, the shelter at night, the food, the fire; besides, they were always being shifted, and from time to time one would be sold. Once he did find a man who could talk, but it was all about women,

and strictly anatomical at that, so the romantic nineteen-year-old liked it still less. Another thing was that Meromic was naturally clean, after the fashion of a Gallic chief, but his companions were not, even if they'd had the chance of being. He got perfectly used after a time to the smell of dust and sweat and dirty wounds; but he rather hated that amount of lice.

The towns were more plentiful as they came into southern Gaul; buyers were many and prices were going up; usually he did not know the names of the towns, but once in a crowded market-place he asked a child, and was told Curdun. And he might have known: two riders were coming straight towards him, their tartan cloaks with little golden apples at the corners hanging over their horses' flanks, their necks and arms gay with twisted gold and enamel. Ardorix of Curdun reined in his horse and stared. Meromic turned away too late; he heard the light mocking voice that he remembered so well from the Assemblies: "And what are you doing in this company, Meromic? I suppose you were in the sea-fight—yes? Of course I could have told you how it was bound to end, but you Northerners won't take advice."

Meromic was furious: "At least it was better than sitting down here like dogs and taking orders from your masters!"

Ardorix laughed: "I wouldn't say too much about masters if I were you. Do you want me to buy you?"

"Indeed and I do not!"

"Well, well, you needn't get angry about it. They don't seem to have branded you yet; you've got that

to look forward to. I hear Italy's the great place for floggings now; I'd have treated you better."

He moved off; Caltane stayed behind for a moment: "Are you sure you don't want to be bought, Meromic? I will myself if you choose."

"No, thanks, Caltane," said the other. "I'm going through with it now. And I tell you this, I'd sooner obey a Roman than an Arvernian any day; I don't like half-and-halfs!"

Caltane rode on too, and Meromic simmered with rage, while his fellow-slaves looked at him, not understanding in the least.

Five minutes afterwards the two cousins came back with a big basket they had just bought. There was fruit in it, bloomy on green leaves, cheese, cream, eggs and white bread, all the things Meromic had not seen for months and, naturally, longed for. But he drew back.

"No, go on, take it!" said Caltane; "I know you must be feeling bad enough. After all"—and he blushed hotly—"we're fellow Gauls."

Meromic took the basket at that, and shared it religiously with the others, because he had not yet learnt the slave's lesson of grab, and they left Curdun behind them the same afternoon.

One day they came in sight of the sea again and were all sent down to bathe. Meromic had never seen a sea like this—it seemed to be always calm and there were no tides. The road went beside for some days; but even the flowers and sea-gulls were different. The worst of this part of the journey was that they had very little to eat except chestnuts, which were nice at first,

but upsetting as sole diet to these meat-eaters of Gaul.

There was a good deal of buying and selling done in the towns and villages about here; twenty of the Gauls were left in the gang that trailed steadily down towards the Capital, and perhaps a dozen others, Spaniards, Dalmatians and Greeks, were added to them. They did most of the journey early in the morning or through the cooling evening when the glow-worms shone at the road edge. Meromic's wound had healed cleanly, and gave him little pain; but somehow he found the arm was almost useless still, and there were two fingers he could not move; he did not know, of course, that a nerve was cut and must join up again before his arm could get right.

During these steady marches south his mind was fairly much at peace; there was nothing he could do yet to alter his position and he was perfectly vague about the future. He must wait, wait till they were there, at Rome. Overhead the new, bright stars crowded the sky; the road stretched straight and white ahead, to Rome. He could endure, wondering what would happen to him, who he would find, at Rome. Surely a new life would begin, he was not broken yet, he could hope still—oh, marvellously, though what he hoped for he could not tell.

It was on one of these evenings that they saw at last the glare over a great city, far ahead of them in the sky. Their master hurried them on anxiously. The next day they were staring about them at the great walls, the fine houses, and the shops along the streets.

They found that their master was only the agent of another man, a Greek merchant on a really large scale.

They were handed over to him; their clothes were burnt, they were washed, rather forcibly; their hair was cut to a decent length, which the two or three Belgians hated, as it was geas for them to cut hair or beard, and they were well fed and given a good night's rest before they were taken out into the market.

The merchant was an artist in his way; he arranged those naked young bodies as carefully as a sculptor, to give every possible value to strong limbs and beauty of face or form. Of course this was only worth while for a few of the slaves; most of them were chained in rows like so many cattle, and the best-looking women would usually be shown only to prospective purchasers inside the shop. The merchant, poor man, had a real admiration for these six-foot barbarians, and regretted quite intensely that when they passed through his hands first they were almost always far too wild to get into the classical poses he would have liked so much; they fought and struggled and had to be chained, his beautiful groups were spoilt: an unsatisfactory life, indeed!

It was a fine morning, but fresh, almost chilly, as they were driven out, whispering to one another, to take their places; six of them were chosen for the "window-dressing": a brown-haired Spanish boy of about twelve, Meromic and three other Gauls, and a German, even bigger and fairer than the others. There was a great block of stone, four feet high and perhaps twelve in length, faced with grey marble and with staples for chains at back and sides, standing in front of the bound ranks; they were told to get up. At this the German turned and fought, biting because his hands were tied; the merchant did not want to have

whip-marks too obvious on him that day, so they twisted a thick cloth tight over his nose and mouth, and only let it go when he was getting blue in the face, trembling and obedient. He was put in the centre of the group, chained very securely in case he had the same fit again. The boy, who was much too frightened to need chaining, was made to sit at his feet, leaning back on one hand and dangling his legs over the front of the block. Two of the Gauls were put at each side of the German; how their master wished he could make them into pairs of wrestlers or disc-throwers! The lines of their bodies looked so hopelessly stiff and wooden in this uncompromising attitude of hands fast behind surly backs! He made them lift one foot on to a block, turn their heads, kneel—he tried making one of them lie down; but he couldn't get them right. Such good material too—but they were taking a third of their price off, looking like that!

He grew impatient, his customers would be coming soon; he had a brilliant idea, collected ten jet-black and shining Africans, all of the same height and looks, and stood them, close together, along the back of the block: a perfect background if he could only get the others to go into the picture he had in his mind's eye. At last, almost by accident, he got the two on the left into a tolerable position, with all four hands chained rather loosely together and their fair, defiant heads high above the fast-filling market-place. But he wanted something different for the other two; the German might fetch a fancy price, possibly for the arena, but Meromic was really the pick of the bunch, able, as he was, to speak and read Latin, and he should

be shown off properly. He was particularly hard to deal with, you put him into a pose, but every bone and muscle seemed to parody it! At last two poles were run into the staples behind, and he was chained to them with his arms spread out, a safe attitude as far as looks went, but one that could not be borne, even as a punishment, for very long. He looked fine now—if only he would keep his head up!—the long-lashed, blue eyes, and yellow hair, glowing, now that the sun had crept over to their side, against the line of impassive negroes!

The square was humming by this time with its bright-coloured, quick-moving crowd, its street criers, its round, jolting chariots and their excited little horses, its slow, curtained litters, its beggars, its dogs, its gutter-babies and its cabbage leaves. Meromic could have seen it all very well if he had wanted to, but he was having a bad day. Like all half-civilized people, he hated being stared at with no clothes on, by all and sundry; the elder men disliked it more, perhaps, except for the German, who didn't care—but then he was a thorough savage. However, by the time he had been chained for an hour or so, that had quite gone out of his mind, which seemed to concentrate itself on this ache all along his arms and most of all about the right shoulder; he endured it somehow for a time, till his master, seeing him go white, had him unchained, and let him sit, curled up, beside the German. He noticed then that the boy and one of the Gauls from the other side had been sold already, and wondered if there had been any offers for him. Several customers had, indeed, inquired, but the merchant had held out

for a higher price, and they had wandered off or been satisfied with something else from his large stock; he was distinctly pleased with Meromic now: every line of his limp body was supple and curving: he looked a good deal more submissive, too, than he was likely to prove! Probably he would have to be chained again as soon as he was rested.

However, a well-known figure had appeared in the meantime, a customer who could be trusted to appreciate this class of goods at their full value—but no more! Hearing of the new arrival of Gauls, he had come down early to buy two or three good horsemen to herd his cattle on the big estate to the south; he was an oldish man by now, but he never let his Sicilian steward do this sort of thing for him, judging himself, perhaps rightly, to be much more of an expert. He picked out what he wanted, had them put through their paces, and bought them without more bargaining than would make him respected as a sound business man.

"Have you anything else that would interest me?"

The dealer considered; he knew that his prettiest girls would only awake a frown, his most charming young boys would be passed over scornfully. Finally he turned towards Meromic: "The very thing, sir!"

Meromic was sitting on the block, with the stiffness gradually wearing out of his arms, beginning to watch the crowd, wondering which, if any, of these languid and perfumed young men, these bald and consequential old men, would make him a possible master. Suddenly he was called; he slid down and followed the merchant, who was delighted at such prompt obedience just now! He stood on one foot and eyed

his prospective master sideways like a shy horse, with his head turned half away, and disliked him, most particularly a large wart on his forehead, quite intensely and at once. He was questioned about his reading and writing, stared at critically, found fault with, and prodded all over, till he blushed from head to foot and clenched his fists dangerously. He fixed his eyes on the ground, resolved not to be aware of what was passing, to be pure mind squeezing itself out of the unwanted body; but at once he was told to hold up his head—they wanted to look at his teeth, using the summary method of the horse-dealer for getting his clenched jaws open. At this time there were tears standing in his eyes: what was the use of anything if life was going to treat him so? Though he was unbound it did not seem worth while to struggle: everything was pressing on him, this atmosphere of whips and brands and chains, the foreign speech, the walls and pavements of the great enemy town. For a moment he prayed desperately with silent, moving lips; but the Gods were far off.

He heard the price fixed, noticing without surprise that it was now four times what had been asked for him six weeks ago to the officer. His new master turned away without another glance at him; his hands were tied with an old piece of rope, and he was pushed back behind the waiting ranks to sit on the ground and think things over.

"And that's that," he said to himself. "Now, what next?" He could still feel those hands on him, he squirmed all over, rubbing his cheek against his shoulder, as if to get rid of the clinging touch. It

was his own fault: he might have been dead and lying calm on his own beaches, dead and flitting westward towards that Sea-Isle of the Druids, with Fiommar, with his father. He shook his head, doubtful, like all but a very few in any generation, of immortality as compared with life. He was still at the beginning, he had been very happy up till now, he would be happy again. He cast back in his mind to dances and feasts, the deer-hunt and the boar-hunt, long days of fishing in the high-prowed boats; he was young enough not to be thinking all the time, never again; and besides, the same things would be no good without his sister and his friends. There was life going on here too, things to be seen and tested and thought about, colour which he loved, light, music,—only would he get any of them? What was it like being a slave? What would they try and make him do? Clearly it was a different business from the casual, outspoken house and field service of his father's people. This wooden-faced old man who had bought him: what did he think? That Meromic the Wolf, the Pride of the Islands, was going to obey him?—well, he should see! Was it likely! And the Wolf sat up straight, rested again and recovering his self-respect, with his mouth shut defiantly, his neck unbowed.

In the evening he was driven, with his hands still bound, to his master's house; the door jarred to behind him, the trap was sprung; he looked from side to side, and there was fear in his heart.

Chapter 5: *Autumn,* 55 *B.C.*

"There's statues gracing
This noble place in—
All heathen gods
And nymphs so fair;
Bold Neptune, Plutarch,
And Nicodemus,
All standing naked
In the open air!"

The Groves of Blarney.

THE others were mostly asleep; only a few of the Northerners, Germans, a Belgian, and one or two Dacians were awake and fretting in that stifling Italian August night. Half-way along the garret there was a gap in the tiles, where the moon shone in, spreading a whitey-grey patch in the air thick with the breath of twenty sleepers. Only that corner was dark; Meromic, sitting up on the straw, his head propped in his left hand, tried to make out whether Lerrys, next him, was awake or not. Lerrys was lying on his face, quite still, but with that tension of shoulder and loin muscles that does not go with rest; he was breathing uneasily too, and his hands were clenched under his forehead and the black, shaggy hair that fell over it. Meromic called in a whisper: "Lerrys! Lerrys!" but got no answer, only an extra catch and check in the breath. After that he sat, thinking his own bitter thoughts, watching the creep

of the moonshine across the floor, for nearly half an hour. The night got no cooler; once he went over and drank from the water-jar in the centre of the room; and one of the Dacians spoke to him in his blurred, heavy accented Latin.

Caius Barrus had bought Meromic partly because he seemed good value for the money, partly because it was rather the thing to have a few Celtic slaves about the house, and a great deal because he loved telling his guests about his grandson and how well he was doing in the war, in spite of being under that unprincipled man, Julius Cæsar, and he liked, at the same time, to be able to produce this rather typical Gaul, and show him off. At first Meromic, hating it, had struggled and protested, but it was no good: better to learn not to care—if one could, better anyway not to be whipped, better not to think or speak much, let life alone. His arm was not much use; the right hand was cramped up round the two fingers which he could hardly move at all yet, and he didn't like looking at it; and there was one very tender place, where the lightest blow still hurt badly, as Marses, the Sicilian freedman who managed the house, knew very well.

Lerrys, the Colchian, was a prisoner of war too; he had been bought and sold three or four times—an intractable animal. But Marses had done a good deal of taming during the time he had been in his power, and Lerrys did his work thoroughly enough now, knowing that his Gods had deserted him for ever. Coming from the other end of the world, he yet liked Meromic, and pitied him for still keeping some of his

old Gallic pride and trying not to give himself over utterly to the life of a beast. Not that they got much chance of knowing one another; during the day the slaves were not encouraged to talk, and at night they were usually too tired to do anything but lie like logs till the last possible moment in the morning. Only, that night neither could sleep, and Meromic badly wanted to talk to somebody and get away a little from his own torturing memories.

After a little he whispered again, "Lerrys, are you awake?"

Lerrys half turned his head. "What is it?" he said. "Can't you leave me alone?"

"Shan't we talk?" answered Meromic. "It's so hot. . . . What did they do to you to-day, Lerrys?"

"Oh, to hell with you!" said Lerrys huskily; but then, after a moment, he saw that Meromic was only trying to be friends, and he was lonely and miserable enough himself; he went on: "Thirty with the raw hide—that's all."

"But why? What had you done?"

"Nothing. But he—he thought it was time I had! The devil. If I could get back on him once—— Well, it was one of those old ——s at supper: talking about the war—our war, nine years back—he said we were all cowards. He wasn't there himself! But I was angry, anyway." He paused.

"Go on," said Meromic. "What did you do?"

"I only said it was a lie and what I thought of the old swine who'd said it, to the man next me; but he told—the dirty Greek!"

"And then?"

"Then? You don't think Marses'd miss a chance like that? Oh, a lovely time he had, God blast him! Tied me up and went on till I gave in and said we were cowards: so we are or I'd not have let them make me say it. Funny thing to get whipped for, isn't it, kid!"

His voice shook a little with pain and anger. Meromic reached over and put his hand on the other's arm. "Don't," he said, "you're not cowards! One just can't stand it—when it goes on; no one could. A year ago I'd never have done the things I've got to now, but I know what it's like if I don't; and there's no way out. If only my arm would get well, I'd try to run away; haven't you ever thought of that?"

"My home's too far off; I've no hope of ever seeing it again. One would be caught sooner or later; it's a nasty way of dying, three days on a cross. I've seen some runaways." He turned over on to his side. "What were you doing a year ago—when you were so proud of yourself?"

"I was getting ready for battle; my sister was helping me. We were so sure of victory. . . . It all changed in five minutes."

"Yes, that's what happens. Did they get you after that battle?"

"No. I surrendered. I wish I hadn't now."

"And you've been in this house ten months?"

"Ten months. And it feels like ten years."

"I was down in the country then; it was only luck they brought me up here; some one went sick."

"I wish I could go to the country. I do hate this."

"Do you know what the country's like by any chance, Meromic?"

"Green trees. Birds. Wind and running water. Grass under foot."

"Baby! I'll tell you what the country's like. You're yoked to the plough because you're cheaper than an ox; you carry the hay bales because you're cheaper than a mule; you dig with your feet chained so that you can't run and some one always behind with a whip in case you want to straighten your back. Not much chance of picking daisies that way! You're given just enough food to work on, not enough to get dangerous on; you're herded to sleep underground, barred in, till you envy the pigs in the sty. And if they think they see you looking happy on it all, you're tied up by your thumbs for an hour to stop it. That would be the time you'd listen to the birds!"

"I see. I suppose anywhere else always looks better than where one is. Do you think you'll ever have to go back?"

"Oh, I expect so. So will you when you're older and they're tired of you here. Why do you hate the house so much?"

"It's the whole thing: one doesn't get a chance! It's not only what they do to one, though that's bad enough, and it's not only them. It's us too. That poor little devil of a girl: she's only a child, but she'll go on having dead babies all her life till she dies herself, and the sooner the better, I should think! And it's other things besides women: that black man—you know."

"Oh, *that*; yes."

"It makes me simply sick. I never knew anything before I came here; I wouldn't have understood."

"You silly kid, Meromic!"

"I suppose I am; I've never had any dealings with a woman yet. It's not the custom of my country till one's older."

"Umm. I suppose you were looking at the trees! Oh, I'm not laughing at you, Meromic, only you seem to be made quite differently to the rest of us. Aren't you sleepy?"

"No. Are you? I don't think I can sleep to-night."

"You'll be dead tired to-morrow; but I can't sleep either. Do you like me, Meromic?"

"Yes. Tell me about your war."

"Oh, there's nothing to tell. I'm freeborn. We had a farm up in the hills. I was going to be married, but of course I went off with the levies. We never could risk a pitched battle, we hadn't the arms or the horses; so we waited for them along the passes—we're bowmen chiefly—or cut off small parties. I know all about ambushing; we used to leave cattle loose; then the foragers came and we dropped rocks on them. But we couldn't make much headway. And when they caught any of us they always asked ransoms we couldn't pay."

"How were you taken?"

"I thought I was a better climber than I am; I ought to have known my own hills. They took me to Delos, to the big market. Oh, well, there's no more to it; you know what the rest's like as well as I do. But I've never given in altogether."

They were silent for a few minutes after this, both a little comforted. The moon had set, so the room

was solidly dark, and cooler. Meromic moved close up to his new friend, and put his arm round his neck, touching, as he did so, the hot, raised weals across the shoulder-blades; he whispered, "If there's a chance some day—of anything—shall we take it together?"

"There won't be," the Colchian whispered back; "but if there is I'll be true to you! By all my Gods that are powerless, my bow that is broken, my freedom that is gone, I'll be your brother to get us out of this! Do you take that oath?"

"Yes—from you. And I swear, too, by my Gods who will help me yet, by Mananaun of the high tide, by Midhir of the lightning, by the lance-head and flames of Lugh, by the Council of the Druids, and by my own name and honour which is mine still, and the honour of the Veneti, my people, I will keep faith with you, Lerrys!"

"Good," said Lerrys, "and now, to sleep! You've put hope into me again, you Gaul, and hope is a strong wine."

After that night there was a bond between them, a word and a look from time to time, a whisper in the dark, nothing that could be suspected. No chance of escape came, though Meromic's arm got a little better, and with it the Wolf part of him began to stir; but still something might always happen, some day; and Lerrys worked hard and obediently so as not to be sent back to the country.

It was a big house and there was always plenty to be done; their old master could not bear anything to be out of place, he had a woman's eye for dust, and none of his household ever dared to be seen idling.

He was equally severe with every one, and had no favourites; he let Marses manage the housekeeping, but he might appear himself at any moment in kitchen or store-room or stables. He had a large acquaintance, all that was most respectable in Rome, and was famous for his large, plain supper parties, where the state of the country, the neglect of the Gods, and the degeneracy of manners in the younger generation (his grandson Titus always excepted) were discussed, and the guests grew decorously drunk on home-grown vintages.

One of these functions was taking place about a month later, a strictly bald-headed and unfeminine affair. The whole household was on edge; Caius Barrus had supervised the preparations himself, with Marses shrinking at his heels. Perhaps his digestion was a trifle disturbed that day; at any rate he was even sterner than usual: one unfortunate boy had dropped a jar of salt fish, and six hours later he was still on the ground where he had been left, bleeding in half a dozen places, and calling for his mother in some barbaric tongue. Others escaped more lightly, but all were terrified; they were delighted to watch him recover his temper and mellow during supper. It was a solid business of turbot and stewed eels, wild boar, venison, brawn, stuffed goose, and so on; even the grapes and pears for dessert were larger and heavier than elsewhere. And the dinner service was perfectly good, plain, old-fashioned silver and gold, with no unnecessary ornaments.

Conversation turned, as usual, to the grandson; Meromic, at one side of the room, shrugged his shoulders ever so lightly to Lerrys at the other,

knowing that he would be called on soon: how he disliked this unknown Titus! He was rather changed in looks during the last year; he was a good deal thinner, the soft boyish contours had hardened down to tough muscle and sharp angles of bone and joint; his hair was straighter; he had little colour, and no spring in his movements: his eyes were sunk under the broad forehead, and black-shadowed with tiredness. He wore a dark blue tunic, and there was a country-made copper ring soldered on his left arm above the elbow. Caius Barrus was not the sort of master who dressed his slaves up, but he liked to have them all under his eye at meal-times; it gave him a pleasant feeling of ownership; and looked so particularly respectable.

Meromic moved quickly to his summons, and stood before his master—the Gallic representative. One of the guests wanted to look at him; he went on one knee in front of him, with his hands at his sides. It was an old man with small eyes set in flat cheeks, and a nose that merged gently into a very long upper lip: what was he like? a sun-fish of course, thought Meromic, longing to tell him so. Instead he said, "Yes, sir," or "no, sir," to the questions that were put to him: "Is it true that you barbarians do so-and-so—or so-and-so?—drink salt water, eat black beetles, worship stones with crooked holes in them, marry your grandmothers, poison your lance-heads with boiled dormice?" Meromic felt he was answering stupidly, but really if people would talk like that! Besides, it was none of his business to be intelligent. The man was getting on to religious questions now: "Do you barbarians believe in the immortality of the soul?"

"Yes, sir." (But did we?) "And in transmigration?" He hesitated: "Yes, sir." "But do you believe in it yourself?" (How could he explain the things he believed in? He hadn't the words in Latin. And, besides, what business was it of this old man's? No!) "It's what we're taught, sir, but I'm not a Druid." His master broke in—thank God: "You'd better ask Titus when he comes back; he's sure to know all about it, and we're expecting him any day." Meromic was dismissed.

Now, if Caius Veturius Barrus had had indigestion that morning, wasn't it certain that he would have worse indigestion the next morning, after all that admirable supper? And so it was. Marses was called up and told exactly what he had done wrong; excuses and apologies were swept away, useless. It is humiliating for a very superior Sicilian freedman to be kicked out of the room; he not unnaturally tries to work it off elsewhere. The boar had been over-roasted—not that he'd noticed it himself—so off he went to the kitchen, and had the cook in tears at his feet, and the various scullions huddled and white in a corner, before he'd done. A bottle of wine had been broken; the miserable Greek who had done it was found, stripped and whipped; however, Marses had not yet recovered his peace of mind. What else had his master blamed? The stupidity of the Gaul: very well, Meromic should be taught a lesson. Meromic was fetched, and stood, much like a child, before the irate Southerner. He was threatened with being sent to the country; he knew what that meant now, and went down on his knees with his head touching the ground; Marses kicked him sav-

agely on his old wound, and he flinched away with a swallowed cry. Lerrys, passing through the yard, stopped behind a pillar with a bucket in one hand, waiting to see what would be done to his friend. Marses discussed various tortures, and Meromic kept still, not daring to speak, only hoping it would end in nothing worse than a flogging. Marses had a great command of language: he expressed his soul that way; sometimes it was unintelligible, even to Meromic, who had learnt a good deal of late, but the import was clear enough. He kicked him again, this time to get him on to his feet, spat in his face and told him to follow.

When he surrendered, Meromic must have known that slavery wasn't going to be pleasant; but he didn't know he would hate it so much, he couldn't visualize pain and shame and the breaking of his own spirit, until they were actual, present realities. Yet he might have had a far worse time if he had simply been sent down to the country as an unskilled labourer, like Lerrys; or if he had been bought to be trained and killed as a gladiator; or if he had gone to a mine or a galley. But, on the other hand, as he was in a big house in Rome, it was unfortunate that it should be such an unusually strict and old-fashioned one. Still, it had not been so very bad; there were many quite ordinary punishments that he had never felt; and he had all a freeman's horror of being branded, dating from that first day, when he had seen it done to his own countrymen in their own country. So when he heard Marses sending for the branding irons he fell at his feet again, praying for forgiveness, full of in-

coherent promises for the future, begging for anything else to be done to him, only not that.

Marses was retrieving his self-respect; by the time he had done with the barbarian the day would be clear again. The brands were brought, and put to heat in their little charcoal brazier. It was certainly rather an excessive punishment for mere stupidity: so Marses started accusing the Celt of various crimes which he might well have committed, like stealing food, and not coming when he was called, and praying to strange gods, and being insolent to his betters. Meromic denied it all eagerly, but something was beginning to flare behind his eyes. The irons were glowing. "Lie down!" said Marses, and to the others, "Hold him still!" He stooped towards the coals. But Meromic was on his feet with a great cry of "Up, the Wolf!" went straight for him, knocked him over, and was kneeling on him, thumbs in his throat, and yelling his mad war-cries! The others tried to pull him off, but Lerrys was among them, keeping his oath to his friend, and knocked one senseless with the edge of the bucket. The noise brought up the whole household, who all, of course, went for the rebels, hoping that their virtue would be observed. Marses was pulled away, choking, but Meromic was dangerous to come near: he had the brazier by the handle and was swinging it, left-handed, round his head, with shouts of "The North! The North!" Lerrys had caught up one of the branding-irons; edge-on it did for a battle-axe, and he, too, remembered war, and called on his Gods and his chiefs to help him; but some one threw

a stone from the back of the crowd: it hit him on the side of the head, he stumbled back, dropping the iron; they were on to him. With a yell of rage Meromic flung the brazier as hard as he could into the thick of them; to break arms, ribs and fingers, and scatter cuts and burns among his fellow-slaves, and to leave him disarmed. He had a dozen on top of him; they held him by sheer weight, and got his elbows tied behind him.

Caius Barrus himself had seen, himself had been touched by a flying spark. They dragged Meromic up to him, a wild beast, all eyes and teeth and blood-stains; and Lerrys, pale and silent and giddy from the blow on his head. He bade Marses devise some means of death for them and turned away.

Marses eyed them slowly, collecting his thoughts, and smiled a little. Meromic knew now what he had brought on himself and on his friend as well; he said to him, low, "I'm sorry." Lerrys muttered back, "It's all right," looking for any way of dying quickly; for a moment he tried hard to will himself dead—it only made him feel sick; if he could edge towards a pillar he might be able to knock his head against it. Meromic did not even think of that, he was only watching the look on the Sicilian's face; then he saw a little heap of things growing beside Marses, some like garden tools, clippers and pincers and nails, a thing like a nut-cracker, a thing like two cog-wheels, a pulley and ropes, an iron weight; he shrunk away from them. He was pushed forward inexorably, his dry mouth whispering prayers, his mind on the face of his torturer; his wrists were tied in a new way. . . . He

groaned once, and then screamed, unable to stop himself; again, brokenly, crying, "Oh God, oh God!" as his whole body took the strain. The sunlight broke up into red circles, he could feel the bones of his hands beginning to break; he shut his eyes, a smudge of pain at the heart of the universe.

Suddenly it paused, slackened, grew almost bearable; he looked at the world again, incredibly the same as it had been a minute ago. There was a new voice speaking: "What in God's name are you doing, Marses? Can't I be home an hour without your torturing some one under my window?" Marses was giving a hasty account of the fight, but was cut short with "Wait till I'm out of the house anyhow." It suddenly occurred to Meromic that this must be the returned grandson; he jerked desperately at the rope; something snapped; he broke through the crowd and threw himself on the ground, clutching the grandson's feet. He heard him say to Marses, "Leave the man alone!" and looking up, intensely grateful, saw for the first time the armour and cloak of an officer, and the young, grave face, with eyes that were kindly to him.

Titus sat down on the step, Meromic still clutching at his knees with bleeding fingers; he laid his hand on the Gaul's shoulder: "Was it you I heard just now—your war-cry? You're from Aremorica, then. Which canton?" "From the Veneti." "Were you in the sea-fight?" "Yes." "No man who was in that fight shall die by torture while I'm here to stop it!"

For the least, shortest moment there was a blank,

no sound, no sight, no thought, nothing: the passage from hell to heaven. Then the world swung back suddenly, the good, dear world! His hands weren't hurting now, the blood was only red. He was awake again, whole, at peace, his own self, he was starting a great, new life! He found himself crying hot tears of relief and excitement and kissing the Roman's hands. And Titus talked bad but soothing Gallic to him, and wondered whether he hadn't been rather rash. Lerrys looked on, not knowing when Meromic would think of him, or if he would be able to save him; he saw the two by the steps talking, saw Meromic turn with a big sweep of his arm, then the other beckoning to Marses; he was unbound, he was kneeling beside his friend, answering questions—oh, was it all over? Titus disentangled himself and rose: "I shall have to see my grandfather. You two wait here. And let them be, Marses!" He went out with a little frown, pushing his hand through his hair, and left the barbarians crouching together by the steps, and the Sicilian watching over them darkly.

Titus went, as usual, straight to the point. He found his grandfather writing in his study; the old man looked up with a smile, and signed to him to sit down and wait till he was finished, but after fidgeting for a minute with the back of a chair he interrupted the letter: "Grandfather, I don't often ask you for things, do I? But there's something I very much want now. Can I have it?"

"What is it?"

"Two of your slaves."

"Of course. Take any you like except my secretary—and the Gods know I wouldn't grudge you him."

"Thank you, grandfather, you're very kind to me. I'll tell you the two I want: those barbarians who've just been condemned to death."

The grandfather sat up, dropping his tablets: "My dear boy! Why?"

"One of them comes from a part of Gaul I know; he was in the battle that gave me my command. They're a brave people; I'd like him for my servant —the man you gave me before is really getting too old. The other's his friend. I don't think they meant any harm just now: they were frightened." Caius Barrus was silent, so he urged it again: "I know it's unreasonable, but I've been seeing too much death and torture lately. I hate coming home into the middle of it again, and on my first day. Won't you let me have them, grandfather?"

"It's such a bad example to the others."

"I don't believe there's another house in Rome where the discipline's as strict as here. And I have to go back so soon."

"Well, well, I know it's wrong, but take them, Titus; and listen to this——" He picked up the letter; but Titus had squeezed his hand with a hurried thanks and a promise to return, and was away. Caius Barrus turned to his writing and thought: was he spoiling that boy? Was he allowing him to grow up into a mannerless, irreverent young scapegrace, like so many of his friends' children and grandchildren? He sighed and shook his head; he could not take back

the gift now, though undoubtedly it was most rash and would diminish his slaves' respect for him. Never mind, he would take care to be severe with the rest of them for some time to come. And Titus was growing so like his father!

As Titus had half expected, he got back to the yard to find that Marses had been unable to keep his hands off the two slaves; he was kicking them both, quietly and effectively, his face white with malice. They were enduring it without words or cries, but when Lerrys saw the gleam of armour coming back he threw up his arm like a wounded man asking for mercy. Marses stopped and retreated a few steps before the young soldier's hard eyes, and low, tense voice: "You dirty little Sicilian, understand this: those two are mine, and if you touch them again I shall complain to my grandfather. Take your things and go!" He went, the others following with the things, but all hurrying off as soon as they could, to work in the furthest possible place from him. And he was in such an unpleasant humour for weeks after this, that his mistress, who was hoping to get another gold bracelet out of him first, allowed herself to be carried off to Massilia by her next lover without holding out for nearly profitable enough terms.

Titus Barrus sat down again; the Gaul and the Colchian picked themselves up and went to him. He spoke: "You belong to me now; I don't want ever to have to regret this day."

"You shan't, sir!" said Meromic, lifting his open hand over his head in the salute he would have given to his own general. The Roman saw and smiled;

he was well pleased at having got these two so easily. The Eastern would be easy to deal with—nothing complicated going on in that dark head; they were a good fighting race, and probably had all the virtues one would expect, gratitude and faithfulness and silence. But this other blue-eyed creature, who reminded him, here in the house of his childhood, of faces he had seen for a moment in the thick of battle under winged helmets, faces he had seen among the piled dead of Viridovix's army, faces of prisoners, of hostages—how was he to be treated? He must decide now, before the present emotion had worn off. "What is your name?"

"Meromic."

"Listen, Meromic: I am going back to Gaul in a few days! I may be called on any time to fight your people,—(Was he wise to say that? Gaul, after all, was supposed to be quiet. Perhaps it was as well, though.)—and I'd like you to take an oath to me, to say you'll be faithful.—(Could he risk the next step? If only he knew what sort of rank the man was! He might be anything in this slave's dress. Well, he would risk it.)—I'm not going to demand the oath of you, and if you'll take it willingly I'll trust you to carry it out."

"I'll take it gladly, and keep it. Our lives are in your hands from this day!" (The risk had been well justified then!) He held Meromic's hands in his while the Gaul knelt and swore by all his Gods to be true man to him, to follow him, to guard him, and to die before he died: a good deal more than Titus would ever have asked, but that was the Celtic way.

Titus took them along to his own room, and watched with pleasure how Meromic's eye lighted when he saw the soldier's gear scattered about the floor, and how, hurt as he was, it was yet with an expert hand that he tried the weight of the pilum. Finding that he could read and write, ride, swim, and sail a boat, he congratulated himself more and more on the day's work: this would be a servant worth having! He went over to the heap of arms, picked out a knife in a red leather sheath, and gave it to the Gaul: "Take this and wear it; I'm sure you'll use it well." And Meromic had tears in his eyes: the first time he had been trusted for a year! All that evening the two slaves were busy polishing the armour, mending the clothes, almost afraid to believe in their good luck. Their master's old servant, now dismissed, came and growled at them, but they didn't care; their eyes shone, their hands shook, and their minds raced as if they had been drinking. That night Meromic slept across the door of the room, with one hand on his new knife, dreaming of deer and eagles and riding to strange wars with Titus Barrus.

* * * * *

By November they were in winter-quarters in Gaul; it was very peaceable, and Titus had plenty of time to collect things and ride about the country. During the first few weeks he had tried to find out all about his new slaves; but obviously Meromic didn't want to say who he was—he had no mind to connect this life with the old. The Roman camp interested him enormously; he prowled about it when he had nothing to do, and saw all the things that had puzzled him

when he was fighting on the other side. His master laughed at him, but answered his questions. Gradually his arm got well; every week he could do something new with the fingers; and by and by he could use it again for everything.

One day there had been a heavy fall of snow, the first of the year; Meromic and Lerrys had been out cutting wood all morning, and now they had enough laid in to last for a month. It was evening; the Roman had finished his work, reported and been dismissed. His hut was half underground, half built up with wattled hurdles, and thatched with oat straw. He shook the snow out of his helmet plume and came in; his two slaves turned, obviously glad to see him; Meromic came forward and unbuckled his armour; Lerrys took the stew out of the pot and brought it over to him, with bread and dry figs. "There's going to be a wolf hunt to-morrow," he said, "the tracks ought to be plain. You'd better come, Meromic; you can take one of my spears." Meromic looked uncomfortable. "Don't you want to come? There's no danger!"

"Oh, it's not that, sir! But I can't. It would be geas for me to hurt a wolf."

"Geas——" Titus looked up from his stew.

It seemed to Meromic that this moment had happened once before; he stepped back, almost into the fire: "It was *you* my father made prisoner when you came for the corn!"

The Roman started to his feet, spilling the supper on to the floor: "And you're the boy with the golden necklace—Kormiac's son!"

They stared at one another, Meromic with his head thrown back, the Pride of the Islands again, while Lerrys, on one knee, roasting chestnuts, looked up bewildered. The Roman recovered himself first, with "Tell me, what happened to your sister?" but regretted it at once, for Meromic winced, with narrowed eyes, as from a blow.

"She's dead, dead. She killed herself on our last day of freedom. I buried her on an island where nobody knows."

"Your father?"

"He was one of the Council. You know what was done to them, sir. I'm the only one left."

"My God," said Titus softly, and laid a hand on his slave's arm, "I'm sorry for you."

"There's nothing to be done about it, sir." He looked miserably from side to side, then picked up the plate for Lerrys to refill. "You'll want some more stew."

It made no difference, only that Titus trusted him more, and minded less what he said before him. It was pleasant to be able to come back through the rain on winter evenings, and find a warm fire, supper ready, and something friendly about the place. It was good to know he could bring any one in and the hut would seem hospitable to them. And it was good, too, when he was sick and could not go out, to know that the Gaul was taking charge, bribing the villagers for milk, making brews of herbs and speaking strange, curiously soothing spells over them, keeping him covered with blankets, and later, when he was better, sitting cross-

legged at his feet and singing endless Aremorican songs.

Lerrys considered it all: Meromic was a chief, then, and in a way their master recognized it. Meromic striding about in the snow and shouting things in Gallic. He had never been a chief himself, never had men to follow him, a beautiful long sword, bracelets and brooches, never a golden necklace. He thought about his old home sometimes now, the bare, steep, snow-capped mountains behind, the log house tucked away between great boulders out of the wind. Did they grow millet by the stream still? And the girl: what had come to her? She must have been married to some one else. He had almost forgotten the deep brown of her eyes already.

Chapter 6: *Summer to Winter*, 54 *B.C.*

"The bells of hell go ting-a-ling-a-ling . . ."

SO the winter and spring passed, and in summer they set out for Britain. Meromic was intensely excited; his master thought he might hate it, knowing how much Britons and Celts were one kin: not he! If Gandoc had sent his people two years before, it would have been another matter; as it was, he was looking forward to his revenge.

They lay for some time in the camp by the sea, waiting for a favourable wind. There Meromic used to see the Hæduan Dumnorix roaming about with his guard of horsemen always at his heels; he had heard him once making a speech to the half hostage chiefs, telling them that Cæsar designed to take them over to Britain and there to murder them, that his own life was in danger, that the hope of Gaul lay in their rising together against the oppressor! He had watched him ride out at a fast trot, past the astonished sentries, at the head of his cavalry, and an hour later had heard the bugles all across the camp calling to saddle, and the steady pouring out of the pursuers. And late in the same day he saw the Hæduans come back, shame-faced and draggled, their standards drooping, and heard how Dumnorix had called on them in vain, and turned and died on the Roman swords, crying out that he was free, free, and the son of a free state!

The next day they sailed, and Meromic made himself useful among the sailors. The next week they were making their camp on a low hill; eastward they looked back towards the blue sea, dying away to haze in the distance; westward there was haze again, always haze in this island, but over trees, a forest with clearings in it, patches of corn, herds of swine and cattle, bridle-paths among the thick hazels. The ships had to be hauled up off the beach and earthworks built round them: it took time. While fifty miles further inland the King, Cassivellaun, was arming the tribes, assembling the war-chariots, sending out messengers with fire and spears to rouse the country against its invaders.

One day Meromic came to his master: "If we come back within the week, will you let Lerrys and me go now? And not ask me why?"

Titus hesitated for some time, but at last let them go and lent them arms; the Gaul waved his hand once; they plunged down a forest path and were out of sight.

Gandoc the Briton was now Chief among the Men of the Iron; he had a house of timber, cattle and pigs herded about the woods, pack-ponies to carry the smelted iron down to the coast, and the very valuable friendship and protection of Cassivellaun. Just now the forges were all in full blast, but the pack-ponies were going north, carrying new-made weapons to the gathering-place of the armies among the rushes and dragon-flies of the Thames. Gandoc himself was plying the very honourable trade of a smith; the hammers fell in time, the sparks flew, the bellows roared on the

wood, the swords were beaten out, cooled in spring water, and packed in hay ready for their journey. The smiths wore aprons of hide from neck to knee, and nothing else; they sang as they worked, and their women brought them in great jugs of drink and loads of wood for the fires. One of them told Gandoc there was a stranger who wished to see him. "Let him come in," said the Briton, squinting along the straight spear-head he held in his tongs, almost too busy to wonder who this stranger could be.

The stranger stood in the door of the forge, wearing a Gallic dress; he threw down his spear in token of friendship and said to Gandoc, "Do you remember me?" Gandoc stared, saw, dropped the spear-head and started guiltily towards his own sword. Meromic laughed: "There's no need. You played an ill trick on me and mine, once; but that's over. See, I've deserted from the Roman army to come to you: look at my Roman arms."

The smiths left their hammers and crowded round; Lerrys was brought forward—another deserter; only Gandoc hung back: "You blame me, I know. But I was going to send—it was a difficult year—we had everything ready and then the wind failed. Besides, we could have done no more than you did. We heard about the battle, but not what happened to you or your father: tell me! And—and your sister?"

The Gaul looked him full in the face: "Dead, all dead; but we'll not talk about that."

"I'm sorry, very sorry. But I did what I could, believe me, Meromic."

"That's as may be; but let us not think of it now."

"No, no; there are other things. You'll come to my house?" He led them up, still visibly nervous, keeping his distance from the son of the Wolf.

The others followed them in; it seemed the moment to turn Gandoc's thoughts. Meromic leapt on to a bench and raised one hand for silence: "Brothers," he said, "brothers by blood and brothers by arms, brothers most of all through the cause you fight for! I come from the camp of your oppressors: you are right not to trust me. But look,"—and he bared his shoulder—"this is the mark that should carry faith, this is the wound I got in the battle of the ships. Shall I forget it easily? Not while waves break or leaves grow, not while the Gods we worship together are yet strong to help us, not while the groves are standing and the stones lie blood-wet to the sun! I know there is a broken promise between us; but yet there is this greater thing in my heart and in your hearts that makes that promise only a blown straw. We who are one kin, with one speech and one memory, we Celts, shall we not put old hatreds aside now we are in sight of the enemy? I tell you, Britons, I was sick to see the Roman soldiers trampling your pastures! My hope was your hope, my sword is your sword: use me how you will. I was a slave among the Romans, I am a free man again with you; but it is you I will obey. For you are my people now that my own are dead, your chiefs I will follow, your arms I will bear, and with you I will go forward to drive the Romans out into the sea!"

The Britons shouted and clashed their spears; Gandoc, with tears in his eyes, caught Meromic's two

hands and pressed them: "You have a great heart!" he said. "I was wrong to doubt you. You are my brother from this day on. Welcome, you and your friend, and take of mine what you will; for I know by your words you must be true." He brought them to the table, poured mead, gave them meat and bread. Meromic could hardly speak; his own words had moved him, he had said them with conviction; and now this open trust and hospitality! How could he carry out his plan? These were his people, even as he had said: he must not betray them.

But as he sat there a tall woman came in, a woman with haze-blue eyes and straight hair like washed flax; she had a child by her side who ran over to Gandoc, calling him father: a boy-child. So should his nephew have been! He turned to Gandoc: "If you will, I can lead you by a hidden path to where you can look right over the Roman camp; I can show you where the sentries are, and how each legion is lined; will you come?"

"I will surely; to-morrow early, you shall both take the oath and we will set out at nightfall."

"It will take a day and a night to ride. What oath is it?"

"You will go to the grove of the Shining One and you will swear faith to us and to the King Cassivellaun on the high stone of sacrifice. I do not ask this oath to bind you, because I believe in all you say, only it is the custom here, and a custom is never good to go against."

Meromic and Lerrys slept that night among the rushes on the hall floor; during the first hours of the

morning, Meromic woke his friend with a hand on his mouth, saying, "I can't take the oath, but you must, Lerrys; they are not your Gods: they will not hurt you. I daren't. It's hard enough to do what I have to do, let alone breaking an oath to the Shining One. And they'll suspect unless you go. So there it is."

Lerrys stirred uneasily: "Meromic, I can't either. These Gods mayn't be my Gods, but I am in their country and they'll revenge themselves on me."

"Not they. You have never worshipped them, they don't know you; it will mean nothing to them, just as the oath will mean nothing to you."

"But Gods are Gods everywhere. No, if I take this oath I can't and won't help you against what I have sworn."

"Lerrys, is this my reward for getting you out of that house? Remember, if it hadn't been for me you might be there still, rotting in a prison all these warm nights."

"I know, and I feel it too, but—but——"

"Well, there's no more to be said then; but I thought you'd do it for me, Lerrys."

Lerrys stared down at the rushes; he thought of the Roman house, hurrying down hot passages, Marses standing over him with a whip in his hand; he remembered the night when he and Meromic were awake and whispering in the close darkness of the slaves' quarters. Meromic would not be friends with him any more unless he took the oath. But these Gods: the Shining One—who was he?—what were his powers? Better not to ask. He would make a sacrifice later to his own Gods; they might help him.

He whispered, "I'll take it," and felt the other's hand close on his: it would be worth it to keep his friendship. "But what will you do so as not to have to take it yourself?"

"You'll see to-morrow, Lerrys. And though this will matter nothing to you, yet I'm grateful. I'll repay you if I've a chance. But be sure there's no need for you to be afraid. Pray to your own Gods."

"My Gods are far off; I do it for you." The other sleepers began to turn over and wake; they said no more.

In the morning they all ate together from great wooden bowls of porridge and honey; later they set out towards the Grove, laughing and talking with one another, and leaping the fallen trees in the fine early air. Suddenly Meromic fell with a cry, one foot in a rabbit hole; he got to his feet, clinging to Gandoc's arm, limped on a few steps, but then stopped; the Britons were sympathetic, but he winced when they touched his ankle. He protested that he must go on to the Grove, but it was plain he could not walk; Gandoc sent one of his men for a pony, but a minute or two afterwards Meromic fainted.

"You can't take the oath to-day," said his host; "it's three miles further on, and you must be fit to ride this evening."

"Well then," said Meromic, "as soon as we come back. My friend can take his now." He was helped on to the pony and went back, looking so sick that Lerrys himself hardly knew what to think; only the ankle wasn't really swollen. The Colchian looked after his friend, and then turned cheerfully back to

the forest path again, and on towards the Grove, on towards the anger of the Shining One!

The flaxen-haired woman was nursing a younger baby, but she ran down at once to meet her guest, to bathe and bind up his ankle and to pile soft furs for him to lie on. While she was busy getting food, Meromic had time to wonder what she would say to her man's death by the broken faith of one who had eaten his bread. But what was the use of that? This Briton had betrayed him and his folk: their bodies had rotted unavenged for nearly two years; now it was Gandoc's turn for betrayal. Yet this woman and her children were innocent; well, he would not kill them, though maybe he had the right to: Fiommar had been innocent too. So the day passed. Sometimes the woman was talking to him or singing, sometimes she was busy with her household and her babies. Sometimes the clearing in front of the hall-door was brilliant with sunshine, sometimes it would suddenly cloud over. Sometimes Meromic was sure of himself, sometimes he was very doubtful.

In the Grove the oaks were beautiful and friendly with their thick shade; the foxgloves rocked in the breeze. But Lerrys was frightened; he wished he could see behind every tree; the palms of his hands were sweating. The Druids led him up to the stone under the biggest oak-tree; it was worn and stained with many sacrifices. He repeated the oath after them; they held a hare on the stone and he slit its throat, watching the life die out of its eyes and its kicking grow still; so would the Shining One slit his throat if he broke his oath. They came back along the path,

and when a herd of pigs rushed across in front of them he was nearly choked by his own violent heart-beating. He was quick at picking up languages, and could talk to the Britons a little, but now he could not think of the words; he wanted to pray in his own tongue to his own Gods. When he was back at the house he looked more of a sick man than the bandaged Meromic.

They set out in the evening, with much praise of the Gaul for mounting so bravely, hurt foot and all. Their road lay along a flinty ridge with hollies at each side. Gandoc and Meromic rode ahead, and Lerrys rode behind; every now and then he would glance over his shoulder, though there was nothing to be seen. The night came slowly and cloudlessly, a gradual starlight; they slept for a few hours beside their ponies. "At least, nothing will happen *yet*," thought Lerrys. They rode on again with the first light; the rising sun came full on to their faces—Lerrys did not know for certain whether *he* was the Shining One.

At mid-day they ate, and Gandoc asked how near the Roman camp was. "Five hours yet," said Meromic; and then he began talking—as he could talk if he chose, a quick, coloured unravelling of words—about his home, about his father and about Fiommar. Vainly Gandoc tried to turn him to something else; he went on speaking, to the trees, to the sky, anywhere. He told of his sister's death on the island, and how, one-handed, he had covered the last silky curl with earth, till all that was left was that mound and the stain on the crushed grass. "What do you say to that?" he ended abruptly, turning to the Briton,

who stammered a vague distress, and then he whistled, very deliberately, the first line of a Roman marching song. Lerrys heard: it was for him; he edged his pony up, looked right and left at the thick wood, thought of his friendship, leant over and seized the Briton from behind by both elbows, jerking the reins away; while Meromic, in front, had his dagger just pressing into Gandoc's throat and his left hand over his mouth. They had him off his pony and down to the ground, tied fast and painfully with his own belt and theirs.

Lerrys held the three ponies, shivering, though it was a mild day. Meromic was crouching over his enemy, like a wolf over a deer, and he muttered, "This is for you, Fiommar!" And he laid his hands, with all his weight on them, on to Gandoc's shoulders, and looked him full in face, hating him. Gandoc spat the leaves out of his mouth: "So! I should have known never to trust a Gaul!"

"You should have known never to trust a man you've betrayed."

Meromic got up and rubbed the dagger over the ball of his thumb, rocking from one foot to the other.

"And you didn't even twist your ankle!" Gandoc said, considering; "but that other took the oath! The Shining One is on his track now." He turned his head towards Lerrys: "Your throat—like the hare's. You'll die: kicking . . . soon."

Lerrys backed a step against the solid, reassuring ponies; Meromic put his foot hard down on to Gandoc's mouth.

"Listen, you! All that summer, two years ago,

we waited for you to send; the wind was with you any time in four months. It was a shame on my sister that her man had deserted us; now I wipe out that shame. For want of your help my people died; for want of your help we were beaten in the end, my father was killed, and I was sold as a slave! Did you think I would let you live after that?—you who brought on me sorrow and blows and curses, all that house-full of pain! For my father's honour, my sister's honour, my own honour, say is it justice that I kill you now! "

The Briton's mouth was bleeding, but he answered steadily enough: " Am I to answer you in your own words, the words you spoke in my house, as my guest, two days ago? It comes ill from you to talk of your honour, you that have eaten with me and given me promises! What pledge have I broken that you have not broken too? I say you cannot set yourself up as my judge."

Meromic drew the point of the dagger slowly in a deep scratch across Gandoc's chest: he was thinking.

" You are talking of oaths," he said. " There's another oath of mine: I'd forgotten it; you shall help me to keep it. Lerrys,"—he turned to his friend—" my oath to Titus Barrus: it would be good to give my enemy up to him; shall we do it? "

" Yes, yes! " cried Lerrys eagerly, " and the blood-guilt off our heads! "

" Don't think he'll escape me," Meromic said; then to Gandoc: " This is a better way—you're going to find out what happened to me, your turn to be a slave! And I shall be waiting behind you for my revenge, oh, it'll be sweeter so! Oh, I shall be glad to see

you in chains! On to the horse with him!" He pulled Gandoc suddenly to his feet.

Gandoc looked from one to the other. "You—you Romans!" he said bitterly. They tied him on to his pony; Meromic would not let him speak again: he had frightened Lerrys too much already. They went on along the lonely path; Lerrys listened to the blood thudding in his own ears: it sounded like footsteps—the sun had gone in.

It was nearly evening when they heard a far-off trumpet call from the camp, and Gandoc made one last desperate appeal to the Gaul, not to give him up to the enemy, not to forswear by such a deed all Gallic kinship, not to be a traitor to all his young vows, his hopes of two and three years back! But Meromic did not listen; he had heard a voice he knew, leapt off his pony and ran forward to meet Titus Barrus, and to tell him that he and Lerrys had taken a prisoner, one Gandoc.

"Not the Chief of the Men of the Iron?" asked Quintus Velanius, from the other side.

"Yes, sir."

Both the officers were much excited: "We couldn't have got a better hostage!" "The one man we needed!" "Where is he?"

Gandoc was led off to headquarters, silently miserable; Titus Barrus came back to the tent later, to find the two slaves whispering together over the flaming wood, Meromic with one arm round Lerrys. He was very well pleased.

"What reward do you want, Meromic?"

"Nothing. This is my vengeance."

"How did you get him?"

The slaves glanced at one another; Lerrys kicked a log into the fire and looked round at his friend: "Tell him the whole truth. I want him to know; I want his advice." So Meromic told, not leaving out his own speech, nor all Gandoc had said.

Titus sat with his hands clasped between his knees, frowning, and, at the end, got up and walked about the tent for a minute or two to get it clear in his head, then stood still, pulled at the gold chain round his neck, and turned, a little grimly, to Meromic: "I don't like this. However much the man was your enemy, whatever wrong he had done you, it does not justify treachery. Two wrongs never make a right. If you hold your word to your own kin so lightly, how do I know you will keep your oath to me?"

Meromic flushed hotly and made a step forward, his fists clenched: "If you think that, sir!——" he checked himself and looked away from the Roman, speaking low: "Would you have clean hands now if it was revenge for your sister, your father, and your friends? Besides, I swore nothing to him."

"Lerrys did swear; you are playing with words, Meromic."

Meromic did not answer; he was a slave and he had to take what his master said, whether he thought it just or unjust; at any rate he had done what he meant to do.

Suddenly Lerrys was kneeling before Titus, looking up at him with dark, uneasy eyes: "There's no question but that I broke my oath. Oh, master, what am I to do?"

Titus spoke more gently to him: "I think the guilt is mostly on Meromic, not on you. But oaths are not taken to be broken at once; you know that. These Gods may have some power; you had better both keep to the camp. We shall not stay in this island beyond Autumn." He frowned again at the Gaul: "Now I shall have to go back and tell this story of yours. I wish to God I had never let you go; the islanders will think this is the Roman way!"

Titus Barrus had rather an uncomfortable time for the rest of the summer, with his two slaves. Meromic went about like a man with a grievance, sullen, bad-tempered, slow at his work, not doing things unless he was told, absolutely impossible to talk to. Lerrys was not much better: he was very anxious to please, anxious to do whatever his friend left undone; but it was little use having a slave who didn't hear what you told him because he was for ever looking over his shoulder at something that wasn't there, who stopped in the middle of his work with a look as if the rat, gnawing away at the back of the tent, was his deadliest enemy, who seemed so tired he could hardly see straight, and indeed confessed that he dreamt every night of a throat-slit hare with its head jerking over to its bent-up back, and sometimes he held the bloody knife and sometimes he felt his own head beginning to jerk backwards too. More than once their master would have sold them both and bought a sensible, well-trained man, only there was nobody to buy them —he couldn't sell them to a dealer—and, anyhow, he felt rather directly responsible for them. The evening of the battle with the four Kentish kings, Titus

came back tired out, after having gone the round of the camp, seeing to the defences, and for no special reason lost his temper completely with Meromic; he tied him up to the tent-pole, broke a stick over his back without getting a cry out of him, untied him and threw himself down on his blankets, saying, "What a fool I was ever to take you! I ought to have had sense enough to mind my own business last autumn. As soon as ever I get back to Gaul I shall get rid of you both and be thankful!"

Titus was wounded the next day, a spear-thrust through his leg; he was knocked over by a great wave of British attackers under their great fighting-man, Lugotorix, and his own men had no time to re-form before they were swept back. He was hopelessly pinned to the ground by the spear, and his sword had been kicked out of reach; he was trampled underfoot, he could make out nothing of what was happening; he buried his face in his arms and waited, for how long he could not tell. When he was conscious again Meromic and Lerrys were washing and bandaging his wound, and a centurion was kneeling beside him, eager to give his news: the Britons had been beaten, the camp was safe, they had taken many prisoners and recaptured all their own.

"How was I found?"

"No thanks to us, sir; it was that man of yours"; the centurion pointed to Meromic. "He's a good fighter and no mistake; we saw him standing over you, and five of them against him. He didn't wait, though, once you were safe; he was off again into the thick of them. And if Lugotorix is prisoner,

it's because he brought down his horse with a spear cast! "

Titus half raised himself to thank Meromic, but the Gaul was silent and frowning as usual.

The wound was not very serious, but it would mean ten or twelve days in bed, which would be quite unbearable if Meromic went on in his present temper. So the next morning Titus called to him to put the pillows straight behind his back, and then, when he couldn't face away, spoke to him seriously: " What's wrong with you, Meromic? What's been the matter all this time? It's no good always saying nothing! After yesterday, I'm not going to sell you, and I'm sorry I beat you that evening. Won't you tell me what you want? " At first Meromic would not say; there seemed to be an impassable barrier between him and the Roman; he was pure barbarian. But gradually, after much questioning, Titus got out of him what it was.

Gandoc was a very important hostage. While they had him in the camp, the iron could no longer be dug and smelted and wrought for Cassivellaun; the Men of the Iron looked up to their Chief and would not have him sacrificed for any promises to the midland King. So Gandoc was guarded well and never given a chance of escape. But, on the other hand, it would be a pity to make too great an enemy of him; even in this disappointing and pearl-less island of savages it was better that the Roman state should have friends; one could hardly consider the Britons apart from the Gauls, and there every influence was important. Gandoc had therefore to be conciliated as well as guarded.

The officers had him to eat with them and filled him with wonder at their cups and dishes, the furnishing of their tents, their harness, and their hog-maned Italian horses, none of which stood less than a head higher than the best of his own shaggy ponies. As a smith, too, he was very much interested in their armour; he wanted to know how it was made, about the welding of the joints between breast-plate and back-plate, the tempering of the swords, the gold inlay on the officers' shields, most of all about the making and handling of steel. They told him a certain amount and let him go to the camp forge and watch their armourers' methods, taking care that he did not learn too much. And then Cæsar had spoken to him, as Cæsar knew how, making the Briton feel strangely more important than he had ever done before, and yet at the same time a child before the strength of Rome. He had sent a message to the flaxen-haired woman that he was being well treated, and her message back said, as he had hoped it would, that she was with child again. Altogether, he was not so unhappy as he had expected to be.

But this was what had been angering Meromic all the time; he saw his enemy, not suffering, not bound and cursing his fate, but strolling about the camp with some young officer among the salutes of the sentries, well-housed and well-fed, his wishes considered, his person respected—a fine sort of vengeance, that! Fiommar and Kormiac lay cold underground; and yet when he had their enemy in his power he had given him up for the sake of another oath, gratitude to the Roman—all his thanks to be accused of treachery!—

and now the revenge was gone, the chance was missed, he was a shame on the house of the Wolf!

Titus tried to get Meromic calmed down, to tell him what good service he had done to Rome, after all—but "That's nothing to me!" cried the Gaul. "Rome! I hate Rome! I made Gandoc prisoner for myself, and I gave him up for you—you—you!" He dropped to the ground, staring at Titus. "You who saved my life in that house!" Lerrys came in just then, with an extra blanket over his arm; he thought unhappily that Meromic was feeling for Titus all that he himself felt for Meromic, and he wondered if one could not anyhow find an equal friendship. Poor Lerrys! He had not dared, since that day, go out of sight of friends, beyond the shadow of the Roman camp; on the march he tried to get to the inside of the column, he would not willingly go under an oak-tree; and at night he slept as close as he could to Meromic, with his hands over his throat in case the Shining One should come and find him bared to the knife. Still, he could have borne it if his friend had been grateful, had tried to help him, instead of going about cold and silent, laughing at him even! He could not help being glad not to be guilty of Gandoc's actual death; he could not hate the Britons as Meromic did; he would not go out and help him, after the fighting, to cut the throats of the wounded enemies; he wished they were well out of this damp, haunted country.

Soon afterwards Cassivellaun sent his ambassadors to Cæsar; the whole of the Roman army was back in the camp by the sea; Autumn had come, the acorns were dropping, the waves were beginning to run high,

it was time to go back to Gaul. Everything was being got ready; British chiefs and Roman officers had agreed very seriously on the tribute to be sent over every year, but neither side really believed it would ever be paid. Titus Barrus had made a great collection of local things: furs, weapons, pottery and ornaments; now he had reluctantly to decide what would have to be left behind and what could be brought over. Lerrys was helping him to pack, and, in the intervals, was being kind to a new British slave Titus had bought, one Dith, Son of the Hornbeam, partly because he was sorry for him, partly because he hoped, in this way, to appease a little the Gods of Britain. Meromic was helping part of the time too, but he went out of his way to be brutal to Dith, and he was always going off to Headquarters to try and find out what was happening to Gandoc. At last he heard: the Men of the Iron had bought back their Chief with many promises, tribute of gold and iron, and a few lesser hostages. Gandoc was brought out among the cheers of his own men, shook hands all round with the friendly officers, and rode off with many small gifts, a finely-wrought cup from one, a bronze lamp from another, and a jar of Italian wine from a third. He was thinking about his children, most of all the one that was soon to be born, his home, the ring of the hammers again, his own food and fire and bed; he had forgotten Meromic.

Titus Barrus was due to embark with the first convoy; he had seen to his men, checked the numbers, rounded up stragglers, got provisions and baggage safe into the hold, and at last given word for the anchor

to be raised and the sails hoisted. When it was all done he went off to where his own things had been piled on deck. Lerrys was there, trying to talk to the unhappy Dith, who was bound hand and foot to the rail of the ship and had his eyes fixed on the high white cliffs, the last sight of his own island; he would not answer Lerrys, only cowered away, shivering, partly sea-sick—he came from the inland Cassi—partly just miserable; he had been wounded in several places, and now he was getting well—to this!

"Where's Meromic?" asked Titus.

Lerrys jumped up: "Meromic? Isn't he with you, sir? He said you'd told him to stay by you."

"Never. I thought he was here; I wonder where he is."

Lerrys looked troubled: "I can't think. Dith, Dith! Have you seen Meromic—the Gaul?"

Dith answered slowly, not taking his eyes from the dimming coast-line: "Yes, I saw him early this morning; I've a message from him; he hit me five times on the mouth to make me remember. He said when you asked for him I was to say he had gone after his revenge; and if he never comes back it will not be that he has broken faith, but that the revenge has turned on his own head." And Dith laid his cheek against the cool, damp wood of the railing, and hoped that something bad would come to this fierce, unfriendly Gaul, who had hurt him without reason.

Lerrys and his master looked at one another; Lerrys spoke first: "He must have followed Gandoc out of the camp; if only I'd been with him! He never said a word to me."

"And now we can't hear anything for weeks!"

Lerrys had hoped they had put Britain behind them for ever, Britain and the Shining One; but it was all to think of again, and Meromic—what mightn't be happening to him now! He crouched down among the bundles, looking north; the night fell in mid-channel, with the sudden flop inboard of cold spray, the creaking of the tackle, the little lanterns on the masts less bright than stars, and Dith muttering to himself in the dark. There seemed to be a kind of flicker on the wake behind them, a spot of light dancing from one wave-crest to the next—following them! Lerrys slid down, very cautiously, and whispered to the Briton:

"Dith, tell me: can you see anything on the sea—there where I'm pointing?"

"Yes," said Dith.

"What is it?"

"I don't know. Maybe it's a God walking along the water."

Lerrys heard his own teeth chattering; he kept looking steadily at that pale gleam; sometimes he thought it was gaining on them, sometimes it kept its distance. His eyes were blinking, he could hardly keep them open, but yet he mustn't shut them or turn away; the light grew larger and then smaller, slid up and down. It had come slowly in towards the ship, it had climbed up on to the deck, it was sliding over to him; he could neither move nor cry; and then he felt he was leaning back, not on the hide-wrapped bales, but on something hard, on stone; and the spars above him had twisted and roughened to

oak-boughs. The spot of light touched his foot, and it felt sticky and cold; it crawled over him, his hands were fixed; it came up, up, reaching for his throat! He woke, stiff in every joint, with a throbbing headache, to the chill grey morning far over the water, the ships of the fleet rocking dim on each side, and the coast of Gaul ahead of them. Titus Barrus was sleeping peacefully, curled up in his rugs; Dith was asleep; there was nothing strange about the sea.

They landed near their old camp and the ships were made ready to cross again for the second contingent. Lerrys had been looking forward so much to being back on Gallic soil; but now he was not certain: one could not put a God off one's track so easily; and he had not even got Meromic to sleep beside. He was busy all day, doing a double share of work for his master, and besides, teaching Dith, who was not exactly willing; but he had time to dream. All sorts of rather unpleasant things happened: twice he had stumbled across a dead hare; once an adder had nearly struck him, though he broke its back with a stick afterwards; there were shooting stars; he had seen a beast he did not know coming out of the sea; an old woman was going round the camp telling fortunes, but when she looked at him she shook her head and would say nothing; and then, one day when they were out cutting wood, Dith had picked up a shining black stone with a white spot on it and said, "A God has been here." And the rest of the army came back from Britain, but no Meromic.

But now their Legate, Crassus, had his legions camped among low hills in the country of the Bel-

lovaci. One day Dith was going over to the horse-lines; he wanted to do it in one journey instead of two, so he was trying to carry a bundle of hay, a sack of beans, a sack of oats and a bucket of water, all at once. He ploughed along, cursing the sacks and spilling the water, almost sure Lerrys would send him back for more. Suddenly some one called him: "Dith, Son of the Hornbeam!" He dropped the sacks and looked round; it was long since he had been last called by his full name, and he was pleased. It was the Gaul—the man who had hit him, who, he hoped, was dead! He made a grab for the sacks, expecting to be hit again; but Meromic was friendly and smiling, he took them from him, threw them over one shoulder, and then took the bucket. Dith looked round at him cautiously; he was very dirty, his hair hung down on his neck, solidly matted, except that at one side it was only just beginning to grow again over a long, red scar; his knee was bandaged; he wore an ox-hide with a hole in the middle for his head to go through, and a lot of woad; and there was an axe at his belt, the haft tied round with a long piece of yellow hair.

"You got your revenge?" said the Briton.

Meromic grinned: "I did that."

They got to the horse-lines; Lerrys started, saw, threw himself on Meromic's neck; they kissed one another, both talking at once; Meromic showed the axe handle: "I cut it off when he was dead. Now, Lerrys, you give me that bucket; I've got to wash." He looked distastefully at the woad: "I can't get this off though." Dith had to fetch some more water, but the work was done in half the time, the horses fed and

bedded down, the wood brought in, the food prepared. Meromic did not talk much: he laughed about nothing, threw his axe into the air, sang scraps of songs, and on the way back quite unnecessarily jumped over all the tent ropes. He frightened Dith at first, but he didn't lay a hand on him, and he showed him how to lace willow boughs together as a shelter for the horses; Lerrys wasn't good at that sort of thing.

Titus Barrus was late that evening; there was a cold wind blowing, with a whirl of leaves over the ground; he pulled his cloak tightly round him, wondered how the new slave's education was getting on, and also whether he'd find a decent meal ready, and wished the Gaul were back, temper or not. At any rate, the fire was burning well outside his tent, and he could smell the roasting meat. Lerrys, with his back to him, was unhooking the joint from the crossed sticks over the glow, and—"Meromic!"

That night they all sat together, listening to Meromic, who walked about the tent, fingering the familiar things, telling his story in bursts, just as he felt it. There was a lantern hung from the tent pole and the fire still gave some light; Titus sat upright on the bed, Lerrys lay on the ground, his arms crossed under his chin, and Dith listened from the darkest corner, head down on knees. Meromic began by justifying himself to the Roman: "I killed him in fair fight; you couldn't have said it was treachery. He nearly killed me too, and I had to run from his men; I had to go west, I couldn't get back to the camp in time; I came over in a trading ship, working my way. We landed down along the coast; if I'd

chosen I could have gone on with them: they were going back to my country, my very own Canton. But I didn't choose: though you say I break my promises! "

Titus murmured something inaudible with his head down; he didn't like being made to feel apologetic by his slave, but after all, perhaps he had been unfair; and he was very glad to have Meromic back. Lerrys got up to throw an armful of wood on to the fire, then settled down again to listen.

Meromic told how he had followed Gandoc and his friends, on a stolen pony, keeping well behind them, how they had camped for the night and he had gone up and thought to kill Gandoc in his sleep, but remembering what his master had said about treachery, left him lying there, and slept himself among the drifted leaves. Gandoc got home and was welcomed by all; the tall woman, whose time was very near, kissed him at the door of the hall; soon the forges were at work again. Meromic had exchanged the pony for food, his axe and ox-hide, and a pot of woad, and hired himself out to a Chief living near by; and he waited many days before he found a chance of meeting Gandoc alone.

But at last one evening, a little time after the child was born, the Chief of the Men of the Iron went hunting; he galloped on ahead of his men, hoping to bring back the boar's tusks as a trophy for his new son's mother; suddenly he saw there was another rider beside him. They dismounted and fought, first with boar-spears until they broke, then sword against axe. The axe won; Gandoc lay dying in the forest with his skull broken; Meromic hacked off the lock of hair

and rode for his life, hearing in the distance the shouts of the hunting party. Riding east for the camp he almost met them, spread out and beating for him; he turned south-west. The pony went lame and he left it. Twice he had climbed a tree and slept uneasily in a fork for a few hours, but they were tracking him with hounds, and he could not get them off his scent until at last he came to a wide marsh; there he had swum over branch after branch of some river, between islands of mud too soft to bear him, or where the angry wild swans attacked him and drove him off. But in the end he came to the other side and lay down on hard, dry ground again, where the oaks come down to meet the alders: desperately tired, but safe.

He lay up in those far woods for a week or more, while his wounds were healing; it was the right time of year: there were nuts and berries everywhere, it was not too cold, and he could snare rabbits and birds. For two days he had followed the right bank of that river, swimming the creeks and always avoiding the villages, until the water grew brackish, sea-gulls were flying overhead, and the reed-beds heightened into cliffs. The river was wide and dancing with small waves; there was an island in front of its mouth, and sea-going ships moored in the tide-way. He found a town with strong, wooden houses, a crowded market-place, and a good harbour; and there were traders from the Aremorican cantons, loading their ships to get off before the autumn storms began in earnest. He offered himself as a sailor to three or four of them, but they had all the crew they needed, and

besides they thought from his woad and ox-hide that he must be an inland Briton and useless on board a ship.

Here Meromic stopped in his story; he stood in the door of the tent, looking out at the night, one hand on his axe; at last he went on: "Well then, I was wandering about the streets of that town, looking for some one to take me, and I heard a voice I knew. It was Louaven, a friend of mine, a man of the Veneti. He did not know me at first; he thought I was dead, just as I had thought he was dead. He had gone over to Britain after the battle of the ships, and married there; he wanted me to stay with him, to be the Wolf again on that coast, which is not so different from mine. I was his guest for a day and a night, then I told him I had an oath to keep in Gaul and I must go; but I did not tell him I was the slave of a Roman. He found a ship that was ready to sail, and told them I was a friend of his; we were four days at sea. They landed me, and went on west themselves; they will be home by now."

For a little none of the others spoke; it was near midnight; the candle in the lantern was flickering to its end; there were few lights in the rest of the camp. Titus felt he had to say something, but could not think what; Meromic had put all the gratitude upon him; but really, if a slave went off without leave—he had not thought of that during the story—and killed an ally of the Roman people, and only came back two months later, what did he suppose his master would say? He ought to be thankful not to be blamed! And yet, after all, there was a good deal:

the Gaul might so easily have gone back to his own people to be a chief again, and no one would have known; and anyhow he was Meromic. Titus got up, went over and took his hand, saying: "It's good to get you back; we missed you." And Meromic said, "Oh, well; I expect Lerrys did everything. How's your leg, sir?" Then Lerrys got up too and put one arm round Meromic's neck and said, "You know I'm glad," and Meromic smiled back at him. But Dith, the Briton, muttered from his corner, "What fools there are in the world!"

After that the slaves went off to their own place to sleep; Lerrys wanted to ask Meromic hundreds of questions, so they sat up, talking, while Dith, huddled among the dry fern, slept the light sleep of a savage, heedless of them, and dreamed his own dreams of freedom. "Were you frightened," asked Lerrys, "alone in that wood, an oak wood too?"

"No. I'd killed him fairly; I thought of that and how I was worthy of my name now that Fiommar and father were revenged. And I had my axe. When I was lonely I sang songs or pretended you were there. Lerrys, would you have been frightened?"

Lerrys shivered, even at the thought: "I would. They'd have got me in a place like that. It's bad enough here."

"Not still?"

"Worse." And Lerrys told his friend of the last haunting, the light on the sea, the dead hares, and how always when he slept, always, the Shining One hunted him!

"We'll have to do something about it," said Meromic, and thought for a moment. "Have you told Dith?"

"No; it's nothing to him."

"But they're his Gods, more than they're mine; he could advise us. He won't tell me, but you've been kind to him; wake him and ask."

Dith was waking already, from hearing his own name said; he listened gravely to the Colchian; he had heard such stories of the Gods before. At the end he said, "It's time you did something; the Shining One has held his hand long; he may strike any day now. To-morrow you should sacrifice, once to him and once to your own Gods. I'll find a place."

So the next morning when their master had gone off on duty, they met to discuss their business, Lerrys heavy-eyed from a sleepless night; he asked if it should be a hare.

"No, no!" said the Briton; "anything else would be better. What do your own Gods want?"

Lerrys frowned, trying to think back to the days he had last sacrificed: "It used to be wine and corn. And peacocks: I remember how they screamed and flapped their wings at the altar. But we'll have to make shift with what we can get."

Dith stood still, swinging the stew-pot, and considered; abruptly he said: "For the Shining One it ought to be a man. But I suppose you can't manage that. We ought each to have something."

Lerrys was the only one who had any money; he said he would see what he could find. They went off to their work, and spoke no more of it until evening.

There was not much choice in the way of animals to be sacrificed; Lerrys had bought three cocks, a black, a red, and a white; they each took one and slipped out past the horse-lines into the dark wood where they would call upon the Gods. Dith went on ahead, steadily, as if he knew the way by heart; the others followed, whispering and dodging the branches. Both of them were thinking "What if this is too small a sacrifice to turn the wrath of the God?" and both of them looked at the Briton: they could say he had run away. . . . If Titus Barrus got to know? He would not get to know; the woods were secret. But still—"The cocks must go first," said Meromic, "then, if there is no answer . . . we might." He had his axe; Dith's head would be as easy to split as Gandoc's. They came at last to a clearing with oak-trees growing round it; perhaps once there had been a house there; now there was nothing but grass and old dead stalks of willow-herb.

They laid the cocks down on the grass with their wings tied; Dith pulled up a turf in the middle of the place and cleared the earth from underneath it till there was a hole the depth of a man's hand up to the wrist. The others stood by watching him. He gathered up a handful of acorns from under the trees, and three acorns he dropped into the hole, and the rest he put round in a circle; he took a stick and he scraped it along the grass so that there was a track from the hole right into the wood, and he bade the others be careful not to tread over that track. Then each of them took one of the cocks and they came to the ring Dith had made and they knelt down, and

Dith said, "You be praying to your own Gods now." And they prayed. But Meromic could think of nothing but a sacrifice they had made at home once when he and Fiommar were little and both of them had thought it was very good and beautiful, but afterwards they had seen their uncle quarrelling with another Druid till they came to blows and pulled off each other's wreaths, and Fiommar had cried. And Lerrys could not make his Gods come real in this Northern wood; he knew they would never hear his prayers.

After a little Dith said, "Now!" and each of them pulled the head off his cock and threw it down into the hole, and the blood steamed in the moonlight; and Dith cried out "Oh Shining One, oh Friend of sun and moon, let this blood be payment for a broken oath and take your anger from the head of the oath-breaker! Answer our prayers, oh Gods!" They waited, huddled together, touching one another, but no answer came; an owl hooted twice; the Briton whispered, "He has not taken it," and Lerrys shook from head to foot. But then, when Meromic was pulling the axe out of his belt, they heard a little noise in the wood, coming nearer. They hid their faces; but when they looked up there was a man standing in front of them, a long, thin man with a cloak wrapped about him, and he made a sign with his hand. At that Dith bowed to the ground and said hurriedly to the others, "He is a High Druid: do what he says." The long man looked down into the hole and said, "These were given by the oath-breaker; you must all give something." Then Meromic tore off with his nails the hair that was round his axe-handle and

threw it in, but Dith said, "I have nothing," for even the clothes he wore belonged to his master. The man said, "I will lend it you then." And he took a silver ring off his finger and gave it to Dith to throw in, and he said, "If you look for your answer you will find it," and they looked and saw the three cocks' heads come on to their bodies again and the cocks crowed all together. It was like some terrible noise at the end of a nightmare and they fell on their faces until it had died all away; and when they looked up again the long man was gone.

They went back quickly, not speaking till they were in sight of the camp again. Then Lerrys said, "Who was the man?" and Meromic answered him: "I could not think in the wood, but now I remember it was the story-teller who came once to my father's house." And Dith said, "Whoever he may be, I owe him a silver ring." They were all very tired and went to sleep as they lay down: Lerrys slept till daybreak and he did not dream at all.

Chapter 7: *Winter*, 54 *B.C.*, *to* *Winter*, 53 *B.C.*

"'But where can we draw water,'
Said Pearse to Conolly,
'When all the wells are parched away?'
'Oh plain as plain can be,
There's nothing but our own red blood
Can make a right Rose Tree.'"

Yeats.

EVERY now and then Titus Barrus would begin wondering whether he oughtn't to free Meromic. He saw him looking unhappy, and understood what it was about, that after this glimpse of the old life, the contrast in his slave's mind was no longer between now and the Roman house of fear and pain, but between now and the open woods or his welcome, as the Wolf, into Louaven's house. And in some ways Titus would have liked to free him; he knew exactly how the Gaul's face would change, his eyes light, how grateful he would be; but then——? Once he was free, Meromic would be away off to his own people in his own Canton, and no wonder; but he didn't want that. Perhaps he might free him on condition that he stayed, but that was hardly worth doing. Besides, his grandfather never freed a slave without getting at least seven years' service out of him, and he had only had Meromic for a little more than one year:

that was no reason, of course, but—well anyhow, he was not going to do it! If he wanted the man and chose to keep him, he was the master and the other was his slave, and so they were going to stay! But all the same he did his best to make Meromic happy.

And quite often Meromic was happy, and even when he was not he could always think about having killed Gandoc; he felt much more at peace now that he'd got his revenge. The woad wore off him gradually —it is a fast dye—and things got more and more to be as they used; he was perfectly charming to Lerrys and made him feel that miserable summer and autumn had been worth while, to bring his friend back at the end. Now that he had no cause to hate the Britons, he used to help Dith, and talk to him, and stand up for him when their master was angry; very soon Dith, who was a simple-minded creature, forgot how he had been bullied and only felt that Meromic was more his kin than any one else, and went to him naturally when he was feeling miserable. Meromic told him it was quite useless to think of escaping in winter when there were no ships trading to Britain, and that he'd only get caught and sold to some one else; and he and Lerrys explained to him what slavery could be like, till Dith shivered and realized that he might be much worse off.

But Titus couldn't very well keep three slaves up there on government rations; many of the officers had no more than one. So as soon as he could find any one to take him, he arranged to send Dith down to the Province, to be kept there till he was ready to have him again. The Briton was to be under the

charge of a dealer who was going south with a whole gang of slaves to sell and a few, like Dith, who belonged to officers who wanted them kept safe for the moment. So as to be sure his own property shouldn't get mixed up with the others, Titus had an iron collar made with his name and rank stamped on it, and told Meromic to take Dith off to the smithy and see it put on. Poor Dith had almost to be dragged there; he begged Meromic to speak to their master, to ask to be let off this; but Meromic pulled him along impatiently: "Dith, don't be a fool! It's the only way you'll ever get claimed again once you get among that lot, unless you want to be branded." Then, as Dith still wouldn't go with him: "Oh, curse you, Dith, come on! I tell you, I've been a slave two years and more, I, the Wolf, the Pride of the Islands, and if I have to stand it, so have you!"

Said Dith: "How can you, Meromic, how can you? I was a free man and a fighter, and it's hard enough; but if I'd been a chief I'd have killed myself or him before now!"

"It's easy to talk like that, but—oh my God, Dith, do you think I like it?"

"No; but you like him—your master, your enemy, the man who keeps you this way; I'd be ashamed to!"

"Well, I'm not ashamed, not after he saved my life."

"You can be grateful for that, but you needn't like him, you needn't come back after you're free!"

"That was an oath."

"Oath! You wouldn't have come back if it had been nothing but that. And when you did you went

jumping about and kissing his knees like a dog—oh, Meromic, don't! " For Meromic had turned on him savagely and beat him about the face with clenched fists. At the smithy Meromic blew the fire while the smith fastened on the collar; a drop of melted solder fell on to Dith's neck and burned him; the Briton whimpered and Meromic laughed—Dith getting what he deserved! Lerrys rubbed oil on to the blister when they got back, and gave him food to take with him, but all the same it was Meromic that Dith wanted most to say good-bye to. " Meromic, I'm sorry! " he said. " I oughtn't to have said that; you mind as much as I do. And you've been a good friend to me. Wish me luck now! " And Meromic wished him good luck and shook hands, and Titus Barrus told the dealer to be kind to him, and him to be obedient to the dealer, and they went off.

Because of the drought the crops had been poor that year all over Gaul, and then on the top of it, Cæsar had taken half the corn for his legions; very soon the country would be starving. The chiefs were fretting already against the Roman occupation: now they would have their tribes behind them. To the officers in their winter-quarters everything seemed peaceful; but all of a sudden it broke up. News came first of the murder of Cæsar's friend, Tasgetius, who had been made king of the Carnutes; a legion was sent off to find and punish the murderers and check the rebellion that was sure to follow. Titus was more than ever glad to have Meromic back for this; he had everything ready for the start, nothing forgotten or broken, food, fodder, arms, equipment, blankets, all

packed as small as possible, and he and Lerrys only waiting to be told what next. On the march, Titus asked him if he knew the country. "I've been here once, sir," he said, "but I don't know it well. There might be a friend of mine somewhere, though." "Who's he?" "Molhir; he's a Druid." Titus frowned; he had heard of Molhir, one of the rebels, almost certainly one of the murderers: "Tell me if you hear of him." Meromic said he would, rather surprised at his master taking so much interest in his friends.

He was a little afraid of meeting Molhir; last time they had been fighting together against the Romans; now—it was just these contrasts that he was trying all the time to avoid. He talked to Lerrys about it, who asked him if he was sure Molhir was alive. "Yes," he said, "I heard—later; he wasn't wounded and he escaped; he was with Viridovix afterwards. If I'd known—but it's no good thinking of that. Only I wonder what he'll say to me." "Wait till you see him. Things are always changing." So they asked whoever they could about Molhir: prisoners and suspects, country people and servants of the Carnutic nobles who came to the camp to give information or bring hostages. At last they heard he had gone off to join Ambiorix, the chief of the Eburones, who was behind so much of the trouble in Gaul; Meromic was disappointed, he found he had really been wanting to see his friend. He told his master the same day at supper; Titus looked up from his plate with, "Well, I'm glad!" but he didn't say why.

When they got back they heard of the horrible

affair at Atuatuca, how Sabinus and Cotta with a legion and a half had been lured out of their camp and betrayed by Ambiorix, how, far outnumbered in the pit of a grim valley, they had fought a whole day till all the officers and almost all the men were dead or dying under the broken eagles. After that there was war through the midwinter weeks: siege and relief, forced marches and hardly-fought battles against the bravest of the Gauls; but much of this time Titus was in the main camp at Samarobriva, which Crassus was holding for Cæsar. By the end of winter Gaul was comparatively quiet, though half the Northern tribes were still in arms, only waiting for their moment, and—worse—had been inviting the Germans to come over the border and help them. But Cæsar was waiting for his moment too; before they were ready he came down on them at one side, Labienus at the other; the chiefs were scattered or killed, the tribes submitted. There was little left to do but to revenge on Ambiorix the Roman dead.

Titus was sent north to the wet, woody country of the Eburones and their savage neighbours, where Ambiorix was hiding; his slaves went with him, mud all over after a day's march. He had little time to talk to them, but he wondered sometimes how the Gaul was standing it. So did Lerrys; one day he asked Meromic, who answered angrily that these Belgians were not his people, and he didn't care what happened to them either way. But all the same he was minding: he kept out of the way as much as he could when there was looting or burning to do; he never made friends with the soldiers, though many

of them didn't mind talking to a slave almost as an equal so long as he was a decent sort of man; and every time Ambiorix got away, he was glad.

One morning the officers' servants had been sent out to forage; Meromic, as usual, strayed off from the others, sick of their talk and hating their ways. He went down along a wet path towards a deserted farm, where, he thought, there might be corn and fodder left; the empty corn-sack over his shoulders kept him fairly dry and he walked quickly to get to the place before the others. He found the clearing, and the farm with its doors flapping open, and looked about among the sheds and stacks; he came on an overlooked corn-chest, and half filled his sack. The door of the barn was stuck, but he put his shoulder to it and got it open; inside it was dark and smelt of rotten hay; he thought of taking back a bale for the horses, but it was sodden with the rain coming in under the door; probably the farm folk had taken all that was any use. He was turning to go out again when suddenly he heard a sound that made him jump: his own name called in a husky whisper from the far corner of the barn. His hand was on his axe, and he was over at the door, panting. But the voice went on, urgently: "Meromic, Meromic! Come back, help me!"

"Who is it?" asked Meromic, trying to see into the dark.

"It's me, Molhir—Molhir of the Carnutes. Give me a drink, Meromic."

Meromic knelt beside him: "Molhir! I never thought—— Where are you hurt?"

"My side: a spear. Three days ago."

"And you've been left alone with it!"

"I got as far as here and then I couldn't get any further. There's water in the trough outside." Meromic brought it in his hands, and Molhir drank and said, "I've been sucking wet hay, but it's bad. Now lift me a little." Meromic put an arm under his back to shift him, but he groaned sharply: "No, stop! It's no use; the spear went too deep. Keep your arm there, though; I like it. I didn't think I'd find a friend again. I woke when the door opened and saw some one walking about, but I thought it was a Roman. And it was you all the time! I thought you were dead. You'll stay with me now?"

"Yes, surely."

"What are you doing here, Meromic?" Meromic bit his lip, not knowing what to say, but Molhir went on in his low, even whisper: "But it doesn't matter. I was so afraid of their taking me prisoner. It's good to have some one of one's own folk again. Did he escape last time?"

"Ambiorix? Yes."

"That's all I care for; so long as he's left. Gaul will be free yet. You'll live to see it; you'll be part of it. But I'm part of it too: though I die. And Ar-roud, your sword: you see how I remember! You'll both fight. Meromic, put Ar-roud into my hand!"

"I—I left Ar-roud with my horse; shall I get it?"

"No, don't move. Where have you been all this time?"

He thought for a moment: "In Britain; I killed Gandoc."

"Good. That leaves you free to kill Romans."

"Yes." Molhir shut his eyes; Meromic heard the slow, painful breathing, and felt his friend's shoulders pressing down hard as every heart-beat centred itself on the wound. When he spoke again, it was fainter, so that Meromic could only just hear it. "I want you to give Ambiorix a message from me; you'll surely see him soon. Tell him I died, and that I know—I hope—oh, freedom's not a dream! Meromic, you must say what I want to say, you can. I'm too tired."

"Yes," whispered Meromic, "yes, I'll do it." He had never felt the shame of his slavery like this before; his tears dropped warm on to Molhir's cheek and roused him.

"Don't cry, Meromic, not for me. It's a good death . . . if one has to die. But I knew They wanted me; last time I sacrificed: no heart. I never told the others; I'm not a Druid for nothing. And He said. . . . Meromic, what am I talking about? Oh yes. If Lugh were willing—— You don't understand. I'm happy about that; I know enough. But I want to be remembered; my people were kings before we had a republic. Make a song about me, Meromic, a good song for men to sing by their own fires when Gaul is free. And put in everything: about our battle, and then Viridovix; and how I was the first to strike Tasgetius—you'll not forget that? I struck him in the throat." Meromic nodded; suddenly it came to him why his master had wanted to know where Molhir was; he shivered. Molhir noticed and said: "Are you cold? You'll wait with me, though? Even if I'm all night dying?"

"I'll wait; and afterwards I'll give you a good burning, Molhir." It was beginning to get late; the rain was coming down again and dripping through the thatch; he wondered a little what Lerrys would think had happened. Molhir moved uneasily: "Is your horse out in this? You should go. . . ." Meromic shook his head and Molhir drowsed off again.

Slowly it got darker inside the barn; by and by it was night; perhaps Lerrys had found some corn; it was lucky no one else had come to the farm. His arm was getting cramped, he moved it a little, but Molhir moaned and clutched at him in the dark: "Don't go!"

"I'm not going."

"That's good. I wish it was day still. But it's light in the Island. He'll make me well; I shall run on grass again." He was quiet after that, only grinding his teeth from time to time as the pain gripped him. Stretched alongside, Meromic feel asleep himself; rousing, he saw it had cleared and there was starlight outside, and then he heard his friend talking in broken sentences. It sounded as if he was quarrelling with some one; Meromic shook him and called his name, but he did not heed, only waved one hand and went on in his fierce whisper: "No! No! I tell you, no!" and then, "I'll not have a Roman here or a Roman's dog! Out with him, I say! Out, out, out!" He raised himself on one hand, pointing at the open door, then suddenly fell back and rolled half over. Meromic crouched by his chest, listening for the heart, but everything was still. He sat beside him with his back to the wall of the barn, very wide awake.

Then morning came with sunshine sparkling on a

hundred pools, and the woods misted with pale, early green. There were some dry things in the farm: a table, a chest, and some bundles of straw; he heaped them together and carried Molhir over, cold and stiffening; he spread the corn-sack and laid him on it with his head to the West. At his belt was the little knife his master had given him in Rome; there were flints outside. The straw flared in a minute, the wood caught; Molhir lay still in the heart of it. The flames were leaping; with any luck they would fire the thatch and then the walls, and light the dead man well on his journey.

Meromic watched a moment from the door, then turned; he went up along the path he had come by, further and further from the drifting smoke. If he went back to the camp he could never take the message; if he took the message he could never go back. Molhir was his friend; but Lerrys was his friend too. And Titus Barrus? He was a friend—or an enemy?

He tripped on a bramble and fell into the mud; he had clay on his hands and knees. Once he had kept his oath; must he keep it again? Oath or not, Molhir was a Gaul: that must come first. But which way to Ambiorix?

A swinging branch caught him across the face and scratched him. He had no sword, nothing. And these Belgians: he knew so little of them, their manners and customs; what would they make of him? He would never be able to prove he was a chief. But at least he would be free, no coming back this time! He would find Ambiorix.

The path seemed to be going north: that was all to

the good. It was a twisty path. Well, he would follow it and see.

He began thinking about the other thing, the song he was going to make for his friend; the lilt of it began to come in his head, the words sang themselves after. But the odd thing was how difficult he found it to sing about Mother; it was all about himself instead. He frowned, intent on the lines, hardly noticing if he went up hill, or down. Suddenly the path turned a corner and he almost ran into a Roman sentry; he stopped and stared, with the song still clouding the back of his head. The sentry, who knew him, called to him that he could pass; he seemed to have stepped back into real life after a long dream. But yet the camp was strange, or else he was seeing it differently. His master was standing by the tent, talking to one of his centurions; the centurion saluted and went off down the lines.

Titus Barrus turned with a start, feeling somebody looking at him; he saw his slave who had been missing for a day and a night. "So there you are at last!" he said. "Now, what's the meaning of it? And what have you done with my sack?"

"It's burnt."

"Burnt! In the name of fortune, how? Don't stand there gaping, man: come here! And make haste!" He spoke angrily, and Merromit came forward a few steps, his hands hanging at his sides. "Well, where have you been?"

"Away. In the woods."

"Is that all you've got to say? Out with it! What have you done?" The Gaul came close, and all at

once Titus saw how queer he was looking, and the dark stains on his tunic. "Why, what's happened to you? What's that on your sleeve? Blood!"

"Yes."

"Good God, are you hurt? Tell me quick! Did you get among the enemy?"

Meromic turned his eyes slowly on to his master: "I wish I had."

"Come into the tent, Meromic. Now: look at me straight and tell me everything. First, where did you go?"

"To a farm."

"And then? What was there? *Who* was there?"

At this Meromic looked all round a little wildly and then threw himself down in front of his master, with, "If you'd known, if I'd brought him back, if he'd lived, what would you have done? Would you have killed him?"

"Who is it, Meromic?"

"It was my friend, Molhir of the Carnutes."

"I see. Is he dead?"

"He died last night."

"Well then, that's settled. But—you want me to answer truly? My duty would have been to give him up. But I think I should have let you both have a chance to escape first."

Meromic looked up: "Oh, you would! I wondered all last night in the barn. But he was dying when I found him: the last one of my old friends."

He slid down into a heap on the ground; Titus, on one knee beside him, spoke very patiently: "That's not all. What else happened?"

"He thought I was on his side; he gave me a message for Ambiorix."

"And you wanted to take it?"

"Oh God, I meant to! And then—I never looked where I was going and the woods are so thick and the path twisted! So I'm back."

"You were under the hand of your Gods, Meromic. What was the message to Ambiorix?"

"Only to say Molhir was dead, and—and—about Gaul being free; he thought I was fighting still. Oh, sir, he asked me for my sword!"

"I'm sorry, Meromic; it's hard on you. But you can't take the message, you see."

"No, sir."

"I thought something of this sort might happen; that's what your oath is for. But I am sorry, all the same. Now, I've got to go; you'd better get yourself something to eat; and you can stay in the tent for a little, if you like." Titus went off on duty; on his way he found Lerrys and told him to go to Meromic; they talked about it all, and at the end Lerrys said, "If you ever do go, to Ambiorix or anyone else, you'll take me, Meromic? Remember, I fought against them too." But Meromic shook his head and went back to his work.

For the next few days Titus kept rather a sharp eye on Meromic; he never quite knew what he mightn't do next; but the Gaul said nothing more about his friend, and Titus said nothing about the lost sack. But then one evening he was sitting inside his tent after supper, checking a roll of names, and the two slaves were banking the fire with wet earth so that

it would last till morning; Meromic was singing something. For a moment Titus had thought vaguely that now the man was settling down again, but then he began to listen to the song; he laid his hand on the open roll and called Meromic over: "What's that song of yours?"

"Oh, nothing, sir."

"Well, sing it me now."

Meromic looked uncomfortably at the ground: "Very well, sir." And he sang it:

"He that's a fighting man
Far has to go;
Hard my friend hasted there,
I must be slow.
Born to the battle,
The ships and the spears,
No man could better him
All down the years!
He killed a Roman
And he killed a king,
Swords would come after him,
Axes would swing!
He has gone flitting now
Out of the flames
Far to that sea-circled
Isle of sweet names;
There he goes hunting
The boar and the roe
Down those deep valleys
Where sea breezes blow.
He goes as freely as
Eagle on air:
Would I could ride with him,
Would I were there!

I can not follow
By land or by sea;
Ay, though his friend is,
The Wolf is not free! "

Titus fingered the edge of his roll: " I see. Don't sing it again. That's all." Meromic muttered something inaudible and went off; and that was the last of Molhir, for the time, anyway.

Early in spring, Publius Crassus, their young legate, went to join his father, the profiteer, in Parthia. His officers wished him luck, and some of them went with him; Titus was hoping he might be taken—he wanted to see this new country—but it couldn't be arranged. Most of that summer was spent in the North; it was a war of punishment and starvation, and Titus was beginning to find Cæsar not always merciful. The Eburones were not powerful enough to make mercy worth while, and besides—there were Cotta and Sabinus and six thousand soldiers to be avenged. So the country was stripped bare of corn and cattle; the men were killed, the women and children sold, and for miles the woods were rotten with unburied bodies.

Then in the middle of it all news came of the battle of Carrhæ in Parthia, the utter defeat of the Roman army; their Crassus with his thousand Gauls, surrounded but fighting to the last on those hot sands, the Parthian horsemen carrying his head in triumph on a lance; his General and father murdered, facing his death most bravely; and the great army scattered through the deserts, the power of the eagles broken in the East! And the Conservatives had carried all before them at the Elections in Rome. Cæsar was out

of favour there; he had to finish with Gaul if it were anyway possible; he could not be everywhere at once, and what might not be happening? These revolts came one after another, destroying the work of years; he hated the barbarians sometimes, as only a conqueror can hate. That spread down to officers and men. The tribes were smashed, cowed, beaten to the ground; and then—peace?

In Autumn he summoned the Gallic Council; the chiefs were given their orders; they had never hated the Romans so much before, but with Cæsar there they dared do nothing. Acco of the Senones was convicted of rebellion; they could not save him; under the Roman law he was beaten to death. They had to look on in horror, half of them thinking that it might be their turn next. And Titus looked on too, that being part of his duty. Meromic stood behind him with his fists clenched; but if the chiefs did nothing, what could he do?

After that they went back to winter-quarters again, and Titus wrote to his grandfather, not quite so much about Cæsar as usual, but just a little home-sick after two years out of Italy. He spent a long time over the letter he got in answer, puzzled and thinking vaguely about all sorts of new things. At last he threw the second sheet over to Meromic, who read it with some difficulty. "Well?" asked Titus.

Meromic handed back the letter: "Do you want to marry her, sir?"

"I don't know, Meromic. I shall have to marry some day, of course. I used to think about it a great deal."

"There's no need yet, sir, is there? You're not much older than me, after all."

"One ought to have children."

"Yes, I'd like to see that. Only—it does make everything different being married."

"It means one's got to get things straight with oneself."

"Have you ever seen her, sir?"

"Yes, once; she was just a child then: she can't be very old now. I went to see her father about a book, something of Plato's, the *Lysis*. . . . I wonder if you'd like Plato, Meromic. . . . She was in the garden, playing ball among the apple trees, a little slip of a thing with long dark hair. She ran away as soon as she saw me."

"Æmilia: it's a pretty name."

"Yes. My grandfather would like me to marry her; I can't see anything against it."

"You wouldn't marry her at once?"

"She's not likely to come out here! And I shan't be going home for months."

"Well, sir, it's for you to settle."

Here Lerrys came in; Titus turned to him: "I think I'm going to get married, Lerrys. And what do you say to it?"

Lerrys gasped: "Oh, really, sir? That'll be splendid! When will it be, sir?"

"I'm not in such a hurry!" Titus laughed. But later he wrote back, saying he was very unlikely to be able to come home for some time, but, in the interval, would his grandfather do as he thought fit about the marriage?

About a fortnight later Lerrys fell desperately in love with a red-haired Hæduan, the daughter of a small landowner whose farm had been confiscated by Dumnorix, and who was now living, rather meagrely, under the protection of the army. Lerrys had never been so much moved before; his many other love-affairs were forgotten, and indeed they had mostly been very temporary. Now he was either ridiculously happy because she'd smiled at him, or fearfully depressed because she'd passed without seeing him. He dragged her somehow into every talk, even with his master—the turn of her neck, the light in her eyes, her wonderfully clear skin, or the warm softness of her splendid hair. At first Meromic was sympathetic, then amused, and finally quite sick of the girl. It went on for weeks; Lerrys was not very sure what he wanted, and anyhow he made no progress; he was always going off to look for Coisha, leaving his work half done, or else just mooning about, quite unable to attend to anything. Meromic did the extra work, but took every opportunity of telling Lerrys what he thought of him, and refused to listen when he started on Coisha—not that it made any difference: Lerrys went on talking just the same.

One morning they were redding up the hut, shaking out blankets and scouring metalwork, with the sun coming in through the open door. Meromic was whistling and hunting for a lost strap; Lerrys paused with a breastplate in one hand and a brush in the other to tell the world in general that he'd been helping her to draw water at dawn and that her arms were—etc.,

etc. "Do get on with your work!" said Meromic crossly. "Or am I to do it all as usual?"

Lerrys started his cleaning again: "If only you were in love, Meromic! It's so wonderful!"

Meromic grunted. "I don't want to get like you."

"But you don't know anything about it!"

"Oh, don't I! What about that little girl over the river?"

"That's not love! Can't you see it, Meromic! She's no more fit to be compared with my Coisha than——"

"Oh stop! I suppose you think she's different to every other woman simply because she won't kiss you. I wish she would; then you'd get tired of her quick enough!" At this Lerrys snatched up an iron plate and threw it with all his might at Meromic, who ducked in time and said, "I'm not going to fight you about your girl, Lerrys, so don't think it! I tell you, I wish you may get her!"

Lerrys groaned. "There's little enough chance of that as things stand now. But yet I think she loves me; she says so."

"Then what's wrong?"

"Her father wants her to be married."

"Well, can't you take her on now, and marry her later? You're sure to be freed some time."

"The father won't let her come. Besides, it's all very well now, but I can't drag her half over Gaul if there's fighting next year. And then—do you think he's going to free us?"

"He's never said anything about it. I don't know;

I suppose it's just what one hopes. If I were free—oh God, I wish you hadn't started talking about it, Lerrys! "

"I didn't! Meromic, have you heard about that bay filly with the white patch? I was told——" They began to talk about racing.

Titus Barrus was rather annoyed with Lerrys; it was all very well being in love, but really the man was carrying it too far! He scolded him and threatened him, and he was pathetically apologetic, but it didn't stop him running off after Coisha whenever he possibly could. And instead of getting better after a time, it got worse; obviously he was very unhappy, and it appeared that there was another suitor coming after Coisha, who could offer her marriage and whom her father approved. Titus suddenly made up his mind; he called Lerrys and said, "If I free you and let you marry her, do you think you're going to do your work decently? "

"Oh! " cried Lerrys, "oh, I'll do anything! " and he kissed his master's boots.

"Very well," said Titus, "we'll make an agreement: I to free you and give you enough money to keep Coisha, and you to stay with me just as we are now until the Army is sent out of Gaul or I don't need you any longer; that means that if this peace lasts you'll have her all the time, if it doesn't, you must leave her behind somewhere and march—and no whining about it! Is that right, Lerrys? "

Lerrys got to his feet with his head reeling; it was all so sudden: five minutes ago he had been miserable, almost hopeless; now—he thought of Coisha panting

in his arms, her hot hair loose against his face, her white throat under his kisses, every delight his own at last! He could hardly speak, only to stammer his consent and thanks.

Titus watched him, amused and rather touched: it meant all that! "Go and tell her, man!" he said, "and say I want to speak to her father; I'll see it's all right. Your hand on it, Lerrys!" And it seemed as if the whole world was smiling on him, on Lerrys, the Colchian, who was going to be free again after eleven years of slavery!

And then Meromic came in. Lerrys looked at him for a moment with his mouth open; then he asked low, "Can't he be freed, too?"

"No!" said Titus, startled.

Lerrys stood very stiff with his head back and said to his master, "Then—I can't. Not without him."

Titus swore under his breath, muttered, "Lerrys, you fool——" and spoke hardly: "There's an end of your girl, then!"

Lerrys turned to go out, blindly, his hands over his mouth; Meromic stopped him in the doorway and whispered, "What is it? Dear, is something wrong? Coisha?" Lerrys nodded. "But tell me! What has *he* to do with it?" But Lerrys swayed against the doorpost and answered nothing. Suddenly Meromic saw: "Was he going to free you? On conditions? Lerrys, was it about me? You said—oh, it's that!"

Lerrys caught at his hands: "Don't say anything! I made him angry!"

"You're the best friend in the world! But listen: go back, say you're sorry. It's no matter about me.

If he won't free me, he won't, and you can't help this way. Go on! "

Inside the hut Titus could hear them; he was fiercely angry with Lerrys, too angry to think of his motives. He looked round for something to break, but considered it would be undignified; he really wanted to hurt Lerrys, he picked up a stick; but then all at once he felt ashamed and curiously exhausted. Abruptly, he sat down and began pulling at the blanket; the slaves were still whispering in the doorway; he called them: " Meromic! Lerrys! Get on with your work and don't talk! " Meromic hesitated, came in, knelt down on one knee and said, " Don't think of what Lerrys said just now, sir. Free him like you were going to, and let him be happy."

Titus drummed on the edge of the bench: " Curse you, Meromic, it's none of your business! "

" It is my business, sir. He refused because of me. Now—he's willing without that."

" Willing! A slave willing to get his freedom! And what if his master isn't willing? I made one offer; he didn't take it; I'm not going to make it again! "

" Oh God, sir, you wouldn't say that if you knew what it meant to us—to him! It's—it's——"

" Be quiet, Meromic! "

" But, sir——"

" Oh, very well, very well; he shall have it. Here: Lerrys! " Lerrys crept in. " I'll give you your freedom on the old conditions. This is my last word. Will you take it? "

Lerrys looked down and thought of Coisha; it would be unbearable to give her up. "Yes, sir," he said.

"To-morrow, then. Now, get out quick!"

Lerrys went off quietly; Meromic got up: "Sir, can I go?"

"No: stay where you are. Why are you looking at me that way? I've the right to free who I like and keep who I like; why should I free you?"

"I didn't ask you to, sir."

"I suppose you want to be free?"

"Want! I do want."

"To go away and leave me."

"I've not seen my country for three years. I can't be the Wolf here."

"Well, I don't choose to free you!"

"I've served you well, sir, haven't I? I used to have slaves of my own. And a great ship, and my sword, and friends."

"Aren't I your friend?"

"I don't know, sir."

"If I'm not, why did you come back twice when you might have got away?"

"I suppose . . . because of my oath."

"You don't mind very much about keeping oaths, Meromic."

"That's what Dith said."

"Well?"

"Of course I can't tell what's been happening at home; I expect some one else will have taken our land. And I wouldn't like not being with you—in a lot of ways."

"If you'll stay, I'd as soon have you free as slave. But will you hate me for keeping you?"

"Never."

"Well then, I'll free you. Now, I'm going to ride. Come on, Wolf."

Chapter 8: *Winter and Spring, 52 B.C.*

"The stars stand up in the air,
The sun and the moon are gone . . ."

Mac Donagh.

ROUND the lip of the hollow the snow was wind-blown and frozen hard into hundreds of fantastic crests, but here in shelter it was smooth and very soft looking. Only, low down in the centre, the old stone of sacrifice made one shadow. The stars, arching over from edge to edge, were high, sparkling, impossibly distant; they were not looking at him, they were not looking at anything, they were alone—as he was. Why were the others delaying so? He moved a little, but the clank of his sword was terrifyingly loud. If only something would happen! What was the use of coming so early? He had wanted to think—to think about Gaul, most of all to think about what he was going to do himself. But now: he was too impatient and excited to think. Some one had said he was young: well, what if he was? There were worse things than being young! And he was not afraid of his uncle any longer. How quiet: far below, in the thick woods he had been climbing through, there must be night birds and small beasts running; but here in the high snow no beast came but man. He fell into a half dream; it was all his, he could feel it all stretching away under him from every side of the mountain —the valley full of crops and cattle and villages,

fertile and beautiful like a loved woman, and then, guarding it, Gergovia, the eagle on the rock, and the long curved chain of the Arvernian hills, this hill the centre and sacredest, full of hollows and pine-woods and secret glens, safe from the Romans: his land. What he could do with it! Already some had called him King, and where need it end?—the stake like his father Celtill, or how? In old days the Arvernians had ruled over the whole of Gaul; and he—he knew so much more; the things he could do, the hopes he could fulfil! He had read and heard much, he remembered empires of the past; he, too, would bring a new beauty into life, colour and song and a fresh springing of art. . . .

Some one came softly up behind and murmured, "Vercingetorix." He turned with a start: "You've come, Caltane! Where are the others?"

"They're on their way; I came ahead. I wanted to see you."

"Why?"

Caltane bent down to take his right hand, then lifted it to his forehead. "King!" he said, "my King! If you need me ever—I'm your man."

"Caltane! Do you think——? Shall I be that?"

"There's many of us now who call you King."

"Your cousin?"

"No; he'll never believe there's any one better than himself. Besides: the child."

"The child has my sword."

"Yes; only they don't think of that, at least she doesn't. But he's coming now; he won't like seeing me with you. I'll go, my King."

They were gathering all round the brim of that great cup of snow, dark shapes, cloaks over armour, the line of helmets against the stars. The chiefs had come from half the states of Gaul, kings and magistrates and generals, Southerners and Northerners, old friends or old enemies, but all feeling this queer new thing, this brotherhood that had drawn them together in the secret night to swear oaths to one another, oaths that they meant to keep. Then the Druids went down over the untrodden snow to the altar; the sacrifice was made. The standards of all the tribes and cities were brought forward and held above the steaming blood. In that moment men found themselves sobbing and praying next to their rivals, their father's slayers, and turned and fell on their necks, full of the thought of Gaul, their dear, unhappy country, their mother in chains, who yet through them would be made free!

Under the stars in the hollow they held their council; Cæsar was away in Italy, having troubles of his own: he might be murdered yet; the legions could not move without him. The only question was who was to have the honour and danger of striking first. Vercingetorix stood jabbing his sword point into the ground: how he would have liked to take it on himself! He whispered to his friend, Lucter of the Cadurci, who shook his head: "No, no, it's not possible. Think, there's your uncle, he'd do anything to stop you now; your turn's to come." So Gutuatros of the Carnutes was the one chosen to light the flame that was to fire Gaul.

The chiefs scattered again, each to his own state;

sleepers in farms and cottages heard the hoofs going by, and guessed, and thrilled at the thought of war. Vercingetorix on his black horse Coré rode back to Gergovia and was there by dawn. He counted up how many he could trust among the Arvernian nobles; thinking of Caltane he smiled, but if only it had been his cousin! Caltane had little power, but Ardorix the chief of Curdun had thousands behind him. And even at the sacrifice Ardorix would not give him more than the barest greeting. Was it all the child, he wondered or would Ardorix always be like that—jealous of any one stronger than himself? Perhaps. And yet he was sorry for the old quarrel: anything that went to spoil the unity they needed so much: could Ardorix not see it too!

But Ardorix, riding east to Curdun with his wife's two brothers riding beside him, was saying to the elder, Varadec of the Bituriges, "He thinks he's going to rule us all, but some day I'll show him he's wrong! How's Gergovia better than Curdun? His father was burnt: let him look to himself!" Varadec shook his head and answered "Time for all that when the Romans are driven back into the sea."

"Ay, but he may be too strong by then!"

"We'll follow you if you're the better man, Ardorix."

"I'm as good as he is any day! There's none doubts my courage or my strength!"

"There's more than that needed when we're out against the Romans."

"All this trickery of his! What are swords for?" The boy Esserac, little brother of Varadec and

Guemoné, agreed with him: "Swords and spears for me! It's a crying shame, Ardorix, I've never killed a man yet!" "But you shall, Esserac, you shall!" "Before the snow's melted too. We'll hunt them over the Alps!" cried Varadec and gave a yell that made the horses fling back their heads. Caltane rode behind, listening to them; suddenly he found he had decided something; he thought: I hate Ardorix and I've no great liking for Guemoné or her brothers; but I love Vercingetorix and I will follow him wherever he leads me.

* * * * *

There were Roman traders settled in Cenabum, and one of Cæsar's officers; they were making their profits out of the Gauls. But on a winter dawn Gutuatros and his men burst in on them and massacred them all in their houses; by evening the news was in Gergovia. Here the old uncle, thinking of Cæsar and the legions, ordered his nephew out of the town. But ten days later Vercingetorix was back with an army behind him, and the people of Gergovia joyfully helped to stone the uncle and his friends down the hill, and cried in all the streets to their young chief, "Welcome, King! Welcome, Vercingetorix! Long life and victory! Down with the Romans!" And he sent out envoys to the tribes, calling them to join him. Then the Hæduan chiefs took council together and decided to be loyal to Rome, for the moment at least; these Arvernians might get too proud of themselves! Maybe it would have been different if Dumnorix had been alive; he might have thought of freedom first of all. But yet Hæduans and Arvernians had

been rivals too long for it to be forgotten for any hope, however glorious.

The Legates waited anxiously for word from Cæsar; they got in stores and were ready to march at an hour's notice; but the country was up between him and them, they could neither join him nor hear anything of what he was doing. But at last he came, crossing the passes when the snow lay six foot deep; he sent his legions to draw Vercingetorix off while he rode north with the cavalry, night and day; he was with his armies again by the first week in March, and then it was war in earnest. The walled towns fell before him, Vellaunodunum, Cenabum, Noviodunum; he was marching against Avaricum of the Bituriges. The chiefs went hurriedly to Vercingetorix: this was not what they had hoped! He told them his plans: to burn down villages, barns and corn-stacks, even the walled towns lest they should be taken, and so starve the invader out. It was hard, but only by sacrifice could they win their liberty. But the chiefs of the Bituriges pleaded for their beautiful city Avaricum; and Vercingetorix was not yet master enough to do all he wanted. So Avaricum was provisioned and garrisoned, and Cæsar began making his works; and Vercingetorix waited behind him, cutting off his supplies, killing and capturing his foragers, trying to wear him out.

Guemoné and her brothers had been born in a castle built of hewn black rocks; there was a village all round it that grew every year as the forest was cleared and more corn planted. She had cried bitterly when she was taken away to marry Ardorix, and the longer

she had left it, the more beautiful it grew in her memory: Curdun could never compare with it! Varadec and Esserac were its lords now, and they loved it better than they loved their faith to Vercingetorix; his orders came, but they would not burn or destroy. The villagers backed them; they sent a letter to their general to say that if he was afraid, they were not; they would stay and face the Romans, and show him that the men of the Bituriges were made of stouter stuff than any Arvernian!

They strengthened their walls, they armed their men; when the enemy came they were ready. A legion was left to deal with them; it went to work with wooden towers and a ram. Varadec was killed when they stormed the castle; Esserac was wounded, but his men brought him away and kept him hidden in the forest, and when he was well enough he and a few of his soldiers rode miserably across the hills to join Vercingetorix. He was taken before the Arvernian King; he had to answer for the disobedience and the letter; Ardorix pleaded for him in vain, in vain he tried by his youth and his wounds to turn the anger of his judge. Vercingetorix was not to be moved; he could never hope to conquer Cæsar unless he was obeyed unquestioningly; there were too many of these wild young men who would not take orders; all should learn by the fate of one. For the sake of Gaul it had to be; Esserac was tortured to death in the sight of all the camp, and after that the commands of the general were not often disobeyed.

After nearly a month of siege and fighting, Avaricum was taken by storm; men and women and children

were killed; out of forty thousand some eight hundred made their way back to Vercingetorix. But yet he never lost heart; he rallied his army, telling them that this came of not following his plan; he made them a picture of a united Gaul standing against the world; he bade them learn from their enemies. And he set to work to gain over the rest of the tribes, sparing neither trouble nor words nor gold.

Guemoné was all in black for her dead brothers and her burnt home; she would not speak to Ardorix, nor kiss him; she shuddered when he came near her, fresh from the tents of the man who had given Esserac to the torture. "Sooner a Roman!" she had cried, and broken away from him, swearing that there was no forgiveness. Ardorix protested violently that he was no friend to Vercingetorix, he was only there for his country's sake. "But is this freedom?" cried Guemoné. "Cæsar would never have done it! And I can't even hope for revenge." She burst into tears; she was one of those fortunate women who can cry and still look beautiful. In a week she had driven Ardorix half mad; he, too, thought of revenge; there could be none if Vercingetorix ended as the conqueror: but that was not certain. He began to wonder whether, after all, he really wanted liberty if all it meant was the chief of Gergovia ruling over every one. He loved Guemoné very much, and he had been fond of her brothers; Esserac had taken half a day in dying. There was no one he could talk with; if his general found out what he had in his mind he could hardly save himself from worse torture than the boy's. For days he put off going back to the camp; he would sit

moody in the hall, seeing his wife, seeing his son with the scarred arm. He almost made up his mind.

Caltane came back full of the praises of Vercingetorix, telling how the tribes had come in from the south-west, horse and foot, bowmen and spearmen, with their kings riding at their head. He had been sorry about the two brothers, but he knew there must be one law for all, else no army could hold together; he had even said so in Curdun, and Guemoné hated him for it. The other thing he did was to go about among the common people, talking to them, telling them of the splendid future that might be theirs, getting into their heads somehow the idea that it is better to be one nation than many clans. He could speak with passion on this one thing he cared about, and it was almost impossible for Ardorix to try and stop him.

* * * * *

There was a certain anxiety in the Roman camp; they were separated from Cæsar by miles of unfriendly country, and though no one had yet dared to attack them, the foragers were always being ambushed and shot at by hidden bowmen. One morning Quintus Velanius came over to find his friend, but Titus was not there. "Where's your master?" he asked Meromic.

"I think he'll be back soon; will you wait, sir?"

"Thanks; I will." He sat down and began fingering a Gallic sword that hung on the tent-pole: "That's a fine bit of work; where does it come from?"

"From Avaricum."

"Ah! it's Hæduan made, I think."

"No, further East; look, sir."

"You're right. Well, Meromic, how do you like it?"

"It's not what I'd have chosen, but it might have been worse. My people aren't in it, either way."

"They may be, yet."

"Yes, and I may be dead! I got an arrow through my coat yesterday. But seriously, sir, there's no chance of their joining the Arvernians?"

"It's quite possible. What would you do then?"

"I've got my oath to my master. I hope it won't happen, though. We've no liking for the Arvernians; they didn't help us, so why should we help them?"

"This is a bigger business than ever yours was, even if it's put down soon. Ah, here's Titus! I've been waiting for you."

"I'm glad you did wait. Meromic, go and see to my horse."

Meromic went off, and Titus offered his friend a cup of wine, but Quintus shook his head: "No, thanks; we want you over at headquarters; you're good at dealing with these unaccountable people."

"Prisoners?"

"No; it's a chief who's come over to us."

"Any one important?"

"Ardorix of Curdun. Come along, and I'll tell you on our way." They walked over, talking, and returning salutes. The Gauls always seemed to puzzle Quintus Velanius; he kept on asking Titus if he could make them out. "The man's come over with his wife and children and his own personal following, but no real strength. He says he was thinking of sending

to us and offering to give up his town—on good terms, I expect! Then his people suspected it, rose against him, and took his cousin for their chief instead. I gather his cousin spared his life, but turned him out neck and crop with no more than he could take with him. A queer state of affairs! "

"They're like that. What does he propose doing? "

"He wants us to besiege Curdun, and swears he can show us how to storm it; he says there's nearly a year's supply of corn and cattle stored there. What an extraordinary people they are! "

"Yes. But we may as well take advantage of it."

"I wonder if he's likely to be truthful."

"There's no reason why he shouldn't be. He's probably burning for revenge."

"But his own town! " Titus shrugged his shoulders; they came to the Legate's tent, which was half full of Gauls. A small child ran against their legs and Titus picked him up; he looked as if he was going to howl, but changed his mind, put one arm round Titus' neck and said confidentially, "I want mother; you take me and find her, man." Titus held him up to look, he pointed: "Oh, there!—with sister." Titus made his way through the crowd to the chief's wife, who stood among her women, frightened and defiant. What a lovely creature, he thought, and suddenly remembered how he'd seen her before; she remembered too, and cried, "Oh, I know you, you'll help us, won't you? You're different! " and called her husband to come.

Ardorix was still a little dazed; he could not believe it: that he had lost Curdun, and that Calthane

of all people should be chief instead of him! And then to have had Caltane giving him his life, bidding him scornfully to go to his friends and see if they would help him! He would never have accepted it, he would have killed himself and lain, an ill omen, across the new chief's path, but for his wife and children, she so beautiful, they so helpless. But now that he was here, received with honour by the Roman general, he was glad to be alive and able to work his revenge; he dreamt of what he would do to Caltane if he ever caught him.

Titus asked them to come over and have supper with him; he meant to make friends with the chief and find out all his motives and what he was prepared to do; and he wanted to look at the chief's wife—simply as he might have looked at a picture, he explained to Quintus, who seemed rather doubtful. And indeed they were both worth looking at: she with her blue eyes and corn-coloured hair, her skin like cream and roses, the amber necklace rising and falling with her soft breaths; and he dark-haired and fierce and passionate, gleaming with tartan and gold and jewels. One at each side of their host, they crossed the Roman camp in the sweet spring evening.

The two servants were putting out their master's best cups and plates, and borrowing from his friends; Lerrys was carefully carrying over a big earthenware wine jar; Meromic arranged the table, wondering who these guests were to be; he was rather pleased at one of the big chiefs having come over—it made him feel less on the wrong side. His master came in sight and he hurried off to put the roast goose on to its silver

dish. When he came back with it they were seated, drinking Greek wine and eating olives and smoked fish; Guemoné was making faces over them, so Titus offered her eggs cooked with milk and cinnamon, which she liked. Ardorix was preparing to be very friendly; he was impressed with the Roman camp, and he liked the careful flattery of the young officers. Meromic came over cautiously, his eyes on the brimming dish; he wore a tunic of rough hempen stuff, which left one shoulder bare, his knife and various oddments at his belt, and sandals mended with twine. He put the dish down in front of his master and looked up; he saw Ardorix staring at him, and stared back himself.

"The bread, Meromic!" said Titus. The guest smiled to himself and said: "So you are Meromic; I thought so."

"Well, what if I am?" said Meromic, getting the bread.

"Oh, nothing; and how do you like being a slave?"

"I'm not a slave."

"Oh, so you've been freed! How nice for you!"

"You're not much better off, anyhow; you're just a beggar here, Ardorix!"

"Be quiet, Meromic!" said Titus, very much annoyed, and Meromic would have obeyed him if Ardorix had not looked round with a grin that wrinkled up all his face, saying, "Yes, you be quiet; do what you're told, Meromic!"

Meromic stood over him with his teeth showing: "Don't you dare to give me orders, you turn-coat! At least I fought like a man, but you—you betrayed your king and your city, you swine, you——!"

Ardorix ate a piece of goose and spoke unperturbed across the table to his host: "We keep our servants in better order in Gaul."

The Roman whispered angrily, "If you can't behave, get away! Do you hear me, Meromic, go! Yes, and ask my guests' pardon first!"

"Not I!" said Meromic. "They're not fit to eat with you, sir. Rotten hearts: both of them! Look at her making eyes at you——" but Lerrys pulled him away as the three at the table got to their feet.

Titus calmed them down with profuse apologies and promises of punishment for the offender, and had a fairly successful supper; Lerrys was very anxious to make amends for his friend, and he wasn't a bad cook. Later on, when they'd gone, Titus took Meromic in hand; he was very angry with him—he had come near to spoiling all his careful management of the chief and his wife.

But Meromic could not be made to apologize: "I'm as much of a chief as he is!" he said. "If I've lost my land, so has Ardorix."

"And then his wife: you'd no business to insult her!"

"Oh, Guemoné; she'll get over it. Molhir always told me she was a little vixen. I wouldn't make friends with them if I were you, sir," he ended airily, and Titus simply sat and gasped.

* * * * *

Curdun was a strong place; on two sides the Curdun River rushed deep and foaming among its rocks; on the third side there were cliffs and ravines in a wild

tangle, and then the main range of hills; and on the fourth the big road ran up into it, between houses and stacks and sheep-pens. Its walls were thick and firm, built of squared stones, beams and rammed earth, with stone towers at the corners. In the centre was the chief's house, where Caltane was consulting with the headmen of the town. He stood on a table so as to be seen and heard by all. He was not very tall, and his grey eyes had none of the fire and beauty of his cousin's; but the common people had always liked him more; he was never too proud to talk with them, he remembered their names, and, best of all, he had not married a wife who scorned and spoke ill of Curdun and the Arvernians. He was anxious now; he was not absolute ruler, only chosen first out of many, and he had to respect their wishes. If orders had been sent from Vercingetorix, he would have burned the town whether they wanted it or not; but the message had bidden him decide for himself what was best, and all had said: stand and fight. Besides, he was very proud of Curdun and proud of the trust that had been given him; he felt that now, after years of dependence, his chance had come; he would show every one—Vercingetorix and the generals, his own people, yes, and Ardorix too!—how much one man whose heart was in it could do for Gaul. Too late his cousin would see and regret, and then afterwards: they would find him the best chief there ever was, they should see he could be grateful! Afterwards, when his country was free and he had taken the oath to his King, Vercingetorix.

But in the meantime they had to stand a siege with

very little chance of being relieved. The Romans were using all their science against them: towers and catapults and rams, hooks, mining under the walls, and fire-balls thrown in; and they replied with assaults every day, arrows and stones and boiling pitch, and always rebuilding the wall wherever it was broken. But the besiegers had one great advantage, and that was some one with them who knew every weak point of the defence; they made much of Ardorix and promised to see him safely restored to his town after it had been punished, and his cousin, if he was taken alive, given up to him for justice to be done. He was always with the Legate or the officers, or else with his wife; they gave him their own version of the news from other parts of Gaul; he had little time to himself to think what he was doing, to see in cold blood the treachery and the shame. Only it was queer to be destroying his own city, the walls he had watched building; it hurt him when the houses were fired or the towers were battered in; sometimes he felt it must be all a dream. But he was helpless now; he had to go on the way he had started. And Guemoné was with him, savage and joyful, talking always of revenge, revenge; she would stand, looking on beside him, her hand in his, and he would feel her fierce little nails digging into his palm.

During the second week of the siege he had persuaded the Legate to send a herald asking them on what terms they would surrender; but they sent back that they could hold out for a year: long live Caltane, Vercingetorix, and a free Gaul! So the siege went on; a good many were killed on both sides, and

Quintus Velanius got a sword wound. Meromic was kept too busy ever to see Ardorix; as time went on and it became ever more apparent that this war was not simply with the Arvernian King and his army, but with his own great nation and its chosen leader, so Meromic got more and more restless; he heard every rumour that came to the camp and could not but be glad of the successes of Vercingetorix and Gergovia, that edge of rock they could just see at the far side of the valley, holding out bravely against Cæsar; and then the Hæduans were beginning to waver. He felt himself utterly a Gaul. He waited for something to happen, something to make up his mind one way or the other; he found himself wishing that Titus could be anything but kind; he made up scenes in which he was treated in some way that made it possible for him to be indignant, forget his promise, and go; but they never came off, and he was never really certain if he wanted them to.

At last they had managed to get a battering-ram to work on the wall of Curdun; Caltane's men were trying to burn the tower it was swung from, throwing down blazing straw and tallow, but the archers from the top shot in over the wall and the ram went on, smashing it in, scattering stones, splintering beams, and driving through the hard earth. It had been going on all the afternoon and Ardorix had watched, with his heart jumping at every shock. The breach was almost made before the besieged gave any signs of surrendering; the Legate demanded that they should give up Caltane and the heads of the rebellion, but the others were to be spared, under oath of obedience

to their old chief. He gave the town till sunset to decide.

In the chief's house they gathered round Caltane, waiting for him to speak; he looked down at them, his friends, men who had trusted in him and his cause; the evening was very still after the noise of all the day; they wanted him to tell them what to do. At last he said, "We are in your hands; I'll not try and stop you if you are giving me up; for the others I can't answer. Only, one thing: before they come, burn the granaries and all we've stored; don't let them have it. There's no more to be done." They whispered together; he stood still, wondering what tortures Ardorix would use on him. But after a time they decided, and one said, "No, we'll not give you up, Chief. But we'll say you escaped when you heard of the terms, and we couldn't catch you. And you *shall* escape."

The town was surrendered; the Romans were very angry at finding that the thick, dark smoke rose from the burning corn and stores; more than one prisoner answered for it with his life. And Ardorix and his wife were even more angry to hear Caltane had escaped. The townspeople knelt in the half-burnt streets, women and children holding offerings of cloth or gold and silver well in front, fighting-men behind, hoping that the dusk of evening would cover them. Ardorix rode in front on a fine chestnut stallion that scattered foam from his tossing head over the bowed backs; his guard was partly his own men, those who had gone out with him, partly Roman soldiers, with Titus Barrus on his left side, and another tribune on

the right. He glowered down at his humbled townsfolk; every now and then he would point out one, and his men would trample in, kicking away the suppliants, and drag the poor wretch out, bind him to a stirrup and so forward again. At each of these rushes Titus Barrus checked his horse and sat very straight and Roman, keeping well away from any contact with the barbarians. And in the lighted hall he sat beside Ardorix, his mouth tight shut, while justice was being done on these prisoners; one by one they were brought up; they fell on their faces with clasped hands, they wept, they kissed the floor, they promised anything. But Ardorix knew what he was about, and Guemoné stood behind him, her pitiless small hand squeezing his shoulder; not one escaped him; the Roman, listening, heard the cries and struggling outside, the sound of axe and falling body, and, later, picked his way out across pools of blood in the courtyard.

But Caltane and one or two of his friends were hidden among the charred beams of a house beside the wall; for a night and a day they lay there, but in the clouded darkness of the second night they crept away; they had ropes to help them down the cliff—they chose the hardest place: on each side there were Roman soldiers camped. Good climbers, all of them, the stones hardly slipped under their feet; not one said a word until the noise of the Curdun river was loud enough to drown their voices; waist-deep they forded it, and climbed the hill on the other side, up and up among the pines. They were dressed like peasants and no one would have suspected them, but

they kept in hiding all the next day, and only started again in the evening, going quickly up the hill paths. Caltane went ahead; the others saw him in the dim light talking to a man with a load on his back, but then he went on and the stranger turned down towards the ford. "Who was it?" one of them asked, and Caltane answered, frowning, "He was a brave man once, and a true Gaul. Now—it's as if he was half bewitched." He said no more for a minute or two, and then: "I spend my life sowing seed; but some of it comes up."

Meromic came back late that evening from foraging among the farms.

"What's the matter?" asked Lerrys, quick to feel every change in his friend's mood.

The Gaul answered, "I met a man I'd known before."

"Another! Who was it this time?"

"He was the chief who defended this town. It all makes me remember my own birth too much. He was escaping, going off to his King, to Vercingetorix; he wanted me to go too. Lerrys, I can't bear this much longer."

"What did you say to him?"

"I said I couldn't, I was under oath. But then he told me—I didn't understand before, it's not like our war, it's not like Ambiorix, it's bigger, it's better—oh, I can't stay here and fight against my own people!"

"Are they in it too?"

"No, but they will be. Lerrys, what am I to do?"

"I'm your brother still, Meromic. I'll go with you to-night if you will it."

"But there's Coisha, it would mean losing her; you couldn't."

"If it is the whole of Gaul behind the Arvernians, I would be fighting for her freedom too. And she's with her father now; I should have her back as soon that way as this. Meromic, say the word, and I'll come. I was a good fighter once!"

Meromic stood looking for a long moment down the star-lit valley. "Lerrys," he said, "I can't. I want to, but it's no good; I think I'd give anything to be free to say it, but I'm not. We can't leave him like this; I know I'd never be happy again if we did."

"Well then, you go, and I'll stay."

"But even that——"

"Meromic, do you want to go or don't you?"

The Gaul began pulling hard at the thick twine round his bundle: "If only I knew! Can't you see, Lerrys? There's half of me aching to get off, to be fighting on my own side, the side I ought to be on; and there's the other half—oh God, Lerrys, I'd give my life for him, I would truly; he's all I've got, he's wife and child and home and everything. I don't care what he does to me—not really. There's nothing I can be sure of except friendship, but that's true, that's a god; how can I throw it away?"

"If I went with you, you'd have my friendship—if you care for that still!"

"Yes, you with your heart on Coisha!"

"He's got his girl too."

"He doesn't love her; she won't matter."

"That's all you care for his happiness then. I tell you, I don't set up to worship him, but I wish him

well enough to want him to marry a woman he loves."

"Yes, of course you do. But he doesn't."

"How do you know?"

"I just do. But I think he'd want her if I went."

"So that's how it is. And you'll be for the Romans."

"I must be because of him."

"Romans—and Ardorix—and Guemoné. I'm glad I'm not you, Meromic."

"And well you may be." Suddenly he turned to his old friend: "Lerrys, have I hurt you? I didn't mean to! If I do go ever, if I change that much, I swear I'll take you if you're willing still!" And Lerrys answered quietly, "You know I'd always be willing to go anywhere with you; ever since that night in Rome."

A few minutes later Titus came in hurriedly: "We're ordered off to join Cæsar; we march to-night. Get everything ready." Lerrys went off to the horse-lines, and Meromic started on the things in the tent; Titus watched him for a minute, then he said, "I don't mind telling you, Meromic; things aren't going as well as they should. There's bad news from Gergovia; we tried to storm it—they say against Cæsar's orders—and we were beaten back. Cæsar is marching to join Labienus; that means—well, it's the first time Cæsar has failed: one can't say more. And the Hæduans are going over to Vercingetorix."

Meromic rolled and tied the bedding, and said, "Then—there's a chance they may drive you out of Gaul, back to the Province, sir?"

"Yes, it's possible."

Meromic began knocking out the tent pegs, thinking as he did it: Gaul will be free. That will pay them—all those who died. And I'm glad; I want it. But I won't say so: because of him. He made the pegs and ropes into a bundle.

Titus said, "I shan't be able to keep both of you now; there won't be food enough, for one thing." He paused for a moment and Meromic thought in a flash: if he doesn't want me—I could go! But Titus went on: "Of course I'd rather keep you."

"Surely, sir. Lerrys could go down to the Province and take Coisha with him, couldn't he?"

"That would be much the best. But it'll be a hard time, Meromic, and dangerous. You'd have to fight, I expect; there'll be no room in the army for any but combatants."

"Well, I'm not afraid."

"I know that. But I don't want you to come unless you're sure of yourself; remember who you'll be fighting against."

"If I wasn't fighting against them I'd be fighting against you."

"No, why? You can go down to the Province and stay there; I'd think no worse of you if you did."

"I couldn't. You really want me to come, don't you, sir?"

"Yes. But you needn't if you think you can't."

"I'd rather come. After all, they're Southerners mostly; Vercingetorix—he's an Arvernian, an inlander; and I'm from the North."

"It's like that now, but if you come, Meromic, you can't leave me however much the North comes into it."

"I'll not do that. I'm glad it's me you're taking, sir." He folded up the tent, ready to be loaded on to the pack-pony as soon as Lerrys had brought it round.

Chapter 9: *Spring and Summer,* 52 *B. C.*

"Stand and face your lover, stand and face your lover,
Stand and face your lover
As you have done before!
Follow him to London, follow him to London,
Follow him to London
As you have done before!
In and out the window, in and out the window . . ."

COISHA stood at the door of her father's house, looking out along the road; her father called her to come in and cook the dinner, but she slipped out of sight round the corner of the wall and sat down. She was going to have a baby, and she didn't feel a bit like stooping over the fire and carrying the heavy pots about. She picked a handful of daisies and made a daisy-chain for her hair; she looked down at herself, thinking that it hardly showed at all, and she wished he'd come back before she began looking ugly. What was the good of wearing flowers with no Lerrys there to see them, to lie at her feet and look up at her, to kiss her hands and play with her hair? She wanted her man so badly! She started crying, pulled off the daisies and tore them to bits; her father called her again and she got up to go in; after all, she was still in his power and he'd beat her if dinner wasn't cooked.

She went over to the well and filled her pitcher; it gave her a stitch carrying it back, but there was no

one to help her now. Her father growled at her as she started kneading the flour with skim-milk and fat, and asked her what she was grizzling at. She wiped her eyes with the back of her hand, streaking the flour across her face.

"When's he coming back, father?"

He spat on the floor and went on mending his knife: "No saying if he ever will. Worst thing I did in my life when I let that master of his talk me round. As like as not we'll never see him again, and I shall be left with you and your brat on my hands. That's what comes of marrying a stranger!"

"I don't believe you, father!"

"I don't care if you believe me or not, but the Romans will be out of Gaul, and the Province too, most like, before harvest. So you just find some one else to marry, my girl."

Coisha didn't answer; she put the dough on to the girdle, and made her father a dish of bacon and cheese and garlic; then she heaped the hot scones on to a wooden dish and waited on him. Then she sat down herself, and thought of Lerrys and the feel of his brown cheek against hers, and wondered what was happening to him now.

She had her back to the door, so the first thing she saw was her father jumping up, startled. But then she jumped up herself, and ran, and threw her arms round her man's neck; and he hugged her close up to him and each felt the other straining nearer, warm and alive and beloved; their hearts beat together.

Then Lerrys said, "I've two horses; can you ride, sweetheart?"

"Of course!" said she, "but am I really going with you? Oh, Lerrys, for always?"

He nodded: "Get your things ready. We're going to Rome."

She ran in and Lerrys followed her and began eating scones.

"Here!" said her father, "are you taking her off for good? Who's going to look after my house?"

"You can get a woman fast enough, father," said Lerrys. "She's going to cook my dinner now."

"But what are you doing here? Has your master sent you off?"

"Yes. With enough money, too, and a letter to his grandfather. Never you fear; I'll keep Coisha well enough."

"What's your news about the war? Who's winning?"

"Oh, Cæsar'll win in the end; at least they say so. But he's not winning now."

"Isn't he! And me that all the world knows was for the Romans! See here, Lerrys, I'm thinking of coming south myself."

"Not with us," said Lerrys firmly. And Coisha came back with her face washed, a woollen cloak over her best dress and all her ornaments, and a bundle under her arm.

"Good-bye, father," she said; "the salt bag's in the flour-bin and there's enough wood outside to last a week. I suppose you'll get the widow at the corner to help you, but see she doesn't cut into the ham for a bit yet."

He kissed her gloomily, saying, "Good-bye, little

daughter; do as your husband tells you, and don't forget your old father when you're away in foreign parts."

Lerrys took the bundle and helped her into the saddle, and her father went off to talk to the widow at the corner.

Dith had been left in the Province with the dealer for six months or so, but then, when Titus found he couldn't have him back yet, he was sent down to Rome, to be one of Caius Barrus' household for a time. He knew he was going further and further from Britain; he was very lonely, and if any one had been even a little kind to him he would have tried to please them and do what he was told. But nobody was; in the gang they had all been treated like cattle, and when he got to Rome and the great stony house, it was no better. He had expected to find some one like his own master, older perhaps, but at least a human being, a man to respect and look up to while he served him. But he only saw the grandfather once; for all practical purposes his master was the freedman Marses, whom he certainly didn't feel inclined to obey. His Latin was bad and he was slow at getting into the quite new ways of the household, so every one laughed at him and gave him the hardest and dirtiest work to do, and bullied him right and left.

Every day he hated it more and more, and at last he flatly refused to obey an order from Marses. "I won't!" he said, "I won't! My own master wouldn't make me, so I'm not going to!"

"Your own master indeed! I'm your master now, and I advise you not to forget it."

"You're not! My master's a soldier and you've never drawn a sword! You're not even freeborn and I am!"

Which was a very unfortunate thing to say, but Dith had kept his temper, more or less, for nearly a month. Marses dealt with him very efficiently that morning, and kept on a little every day afterwards: that was usually the best way of making rebels fit into his scheme of life. Then Dith remembered what the others had told him about slavery; the only thing he held to was the hope that he might be sent for back to Gaul. He was not allowed out of the house, and the news he heard was very scanty, so he hardly realized that the war was keeping Titus too busy in the north to think about his British slave. He went about saying, "Where's my master? When's my master coming back?" till he became a standing joke among the rest of the slaves. He developed a curious sort of loyalty, this way, for the absent Titus—he had to have something to believe in—and he had a fight with one of the old man's Greek cup-bearers, who had spoken disparagingly of the grandson. He won easily, but it did him no good, because Caius Barrus heard and was angry, and had him sent off to the country. So there he stayed all winter, out in the fields in every weather, beaten and kicked and cursed, growing into a beast, his spirit too broken to let him think or remember or hope: and he caught unpleasant diseases from his companions, and got boils on his leg which wouldn't heal.

But one day late in spring, when some old cows and oxen were being driven up into the Capital to be

slaughtered and sold, he was called away from the wood stack where he had been piling logs since dawn, his hands were tied behind his back, and he was driven in with the beasts. He wondered what it was all about, but nobody told him; the ox-herds were all mounted, but he shambled along in the dust, rubbing shoulders with the thin old cows. At sunset they got to the south-eastern gate of Rome; there was the usual crowd hanging about it, soldiers and slaves and farmers and tax-collectors; the herds stopped to water the cattle, and Dith went over to the trough to drink with them. He dipped his head under, shaking the dust out of his hair, and stood up, dripping; and Lerrys was standing in front of him, looking horrified.

"Dith!" he said. "They've done this to you!" and untied his hands quickly.

The herds ran up, but Lerrys showed them a seal, and they let him take Dith away with him.

For a minute or two the Briton said nothing, then he put out a hand timidly and touched Lerrys: "Are you going to take me away?" he asked.

"To my own home," said Lerrys; and they went on through by-streets, across Rome, and gradually Dith began to realize that he might be a man again.

It had been a queer business for Lerrys, coming back this time; it took them some weeks going south, with Coisha looking about her and exclaiming as he pointed things out to her, and the warm, fine days, and his news to give in all the villages. They had spent long, delightful nights in small inns and farm-houses; with her there he had hardly room in his heart to be anxious about Meromic and his master.

But as they got nearer the Capital he began to be silent and not to answer his wife's questions; it was all one long astonishment to her, a fairy-tale coming true, great arches and tombs and palaces, marble and stone, and hundreds of people all going the same way as themselves! She wished she could tell all the girls she knew just what a wonderful place this man of hers was taking her to! But Lerrys kept on feeling the little wallet at his belt that held his money and Titus' letter, and sometimes he laid a hand lightly on Coisha. And over and over again he said to himself: I'm a free man now; nobody's going to whip me or chain me or abuse me, not even Marses: because I'm free; and this is my wife, my very own wife, and I've got the right to protect her and keep her: because I'm free; and I'm not to be afraid of any one, not even Marses: because they can't do anything, because I'm free; and this is Rome and I can go where I like and nobody can stop me, not even Marses: because I'm free!

They turned down towards the grandfather's house; Lerrys dismounted and Coisha held the horse while he went, dragging his feet, over to the door; the door-keeper did not recognize him, and spoke with a little respect. He asked to wait in the hall till he could see the master of the house; the horses were tethered, and he and Coisha sat down on a bench and watched the work of the day going on. There were some new faces, some old; but nobody knew him; perhaps they were kept too busy to stare at strangers. Coisha had never seen her husband like this before; even when she first met him and he was still a slave, he had

never been afraid of his master. She tapped his arm, sharply:

"Lerrys! You're looking like nothing but a snared rabbit: you mustn't!"

He shivered and sat up straight: "No, there's no need now; I keep on forgetting. But you don't know, Coisha——" he gave a little gasp: "There he is!" With a great effort he sat still; he was not going to be humble, not even to Marses: because he was free.

Marses naturally looked at Coisha first, and she looked back at him disdainfully, not thinking much of him; then he saw Lerrys—Lerrys who was cursing himself because involuntarily his eyes dropped and he shrunk into himself before that well-known frown. But he had made up his mind to speak first, and so he did, pitching his voice much too high: "I've a letter from Titus."

"Give it here!" said Marses. "At once, I tell you!"

Lerrys clutched it to him: "No! It's for his grandfather, not for you!"

"So that's the way you speak now, is it? But I'll teach you: I dare say you've not forgotten me!"

"You can't touch me!"

"Oh, I can't, can't I? You belong to the head of the family still. Stand up and give me that letter."

But Lerrys sat still: "I'm not afraid of you: because I'm free!"

"Your proof?"

"In that letter—which isn't for you. Touch it if you dare!"

For a moment the Sicilian looked dangerous; he

swung his head from side to side and his eyes glittered; then, abruptly, he turned and went out.

Lerrys leant back, with his heart thumping hard, and saw that Coisha was white and trembling; he put his arm round her and she snuggled up to him with: "I don't like him, I don't, I don't! Lerrys, are we really safe? Are you sure?"

"Quite sure," he answered, and all at once felt strong himself, now that he had some one to protect.

A few minutes afterwards Marses came in again; he pointed at Coisha: "Who's that woman?"

"My wife, and don't make any mistake about it!"

They followed him to the grandfather's room, and Lerrys gave his letter. Caius Barrus was no better pleased than his steward to find that this slave had been freed, but at least there was the letter from Titus. He asked Lerrys a number of questions and finally dismissed him with: "Very well. While you are in my house I shall expect obedience from you; and no camp manners. Marses, take them away and find a place for them."

But Lerrys said, "I hope to be allowed to do you all a freedman's service, sir; but I have got a room near here for my wife and myself."

Caius Barrus shrugged his shoulders and turned to his book; but, as Lerrys was going, a little alarmed at his own daring, he called him back: "I see this letter mentions a British slave who was sent here."

"Yes, sir. I wanted to ask—we all liked him."

"Hmm. I'm afraid my grandson's swans are a little apt to turn out geese."

"Oh, sir, what's happened to him?"

"He had a fight. I have just told you I dislike camp manners. However, as my grandson wishes it, he can be sent for again."

"Then—he's down in the country?"

"Yes," said Marses, "where you ought to be!"

Dith was sent for, and Lerrys went to see about the room he said he had found. It took a little time, but at last he and Coisha installed themselves in a big, low garret, under a tile roof, full of dust and spiders and stray sunbeams. They got a mattress, a table, a couple of stools, a basin and a pitcher, and some pieces of stuff and cooking pots. Coisha scrubbed it all out and settled down delightedly to a home of her own; Lerrys went with her at first to market—they had to be careful of their money—but soon she picked up enough Latin to bargain for fish and meal and onions, and make friends with the other women in the tenement house, who all began to take an interest in her and give her advice about the coming baby.

She would take her spinning or sewing down to them, or they would come up and gossip and help her to cook: it was a few weeks before she got into the way of using a charcoal stove. Half the time she sang at her work, and then, when Lerrys came home, she would sit on his knee with her cheek against his neck and her hands in his, blinking happily at the warm summer dusk closing in all round them. He brought her growing plants and she set them in the window and watered them, till soon she had a little bower of leaves and buds; and she made herself a thin, loose dress of bright green linen, that set off her red hair. But at the end of about a fortnight Lerrys came back

one evening with Dith, and told her he was going to stop with them. She had never seen the Briton, of course, but had often heard of him, and made him welcome because her husband liked him; but he was a miserable sort of thing to bring into their home, shock-headed, ragged, with sores all over, and so dirty you couldn't tell if he was dark or fair! He hardly spoke at all, and stared at her good soup as if he'd never seen food before. He went to sleep early in a corner of the garret and was still sleeping at noon the next day, a heap of dirt and rags and matted hair.

"I'd as soon have a pig!" said Coisha, stirring the porridge. "He isn't going to live here always, is he?"

"I'm afraid he's got to," Lerrys answered. "If he went back to that house now—— Look at his face, Coisha: can't you see what he's been through already?"

And she was sorry for him, but she did hate having him in her nice place.

But he got wonderfully cleaner in a day or two, and then he did all the hard work, everything she told him, and did it at once too, with an almost painful quickness; and took a scolding or a pail of dirty water over his head without a word. And then quite suddenly she found she was beginning to like him herself after all.

At first Dith had kept entirely to the garret and the big common yard of the house; he was still afraid of all sorts of things. He saw almost at once that he was very much in Coisha's way, and he tried to do everything he possibly could to please her; he was very glad when she began to be friendly. He asked Lerrys about their master and Meromic; he couldn't under-

stand how it was the Gaul was still there after being freed. "Why didn't he go?" he asked. "Why? He can't choose to fight against his own people! I don't call that being free. And why don't you go back to your place?"

"I don't want to, now," said the Colchian.

"Well, I shan't ever forget my country!"

Lerrys shook his head: "There's all the difference between eleven years and a year and a half. Go and fetch me that mallet, Dith."

And the days went on, and the weather began to be very hot; Coisha found she couldn't work very much, and let the Briton do it all. Lerrys had saved a certain amount of money, and he could always go and get one good meal a day at the grandfather's house, and perhaps bring something back; but chiefly he and Dith made a living out of carpentry and odd jobs; they got to know all the people in the quarter roundabout. Lerrys bought a pair of pigeons; they lived in a wicker cage, and in a week or two they got tame enough to be let out to fly about the room; Coisha was never tired of watching them. One evening the hen pigeon escaped, but Dith climbed out on to the roof and brought it back. She kissed its soft white head: "Oh, you bad thing," she cried, "to fly away and leave me!"

"I expect it wanted to go home," said Lerrys. "They came from the hills, a long way off. I don't know how they remember; they might be men."

Dith laughed sharply: "I thought men forgot!"

"Oh, you, Dith! You forgot to get me a new spindle to-day, anyhow!"

"No, I didn't; it's here." He pulled it out and

gave it to Coisha, who put the pigeon back in its cage and took her wool over to the window to get all the light there was. The two men were making a cradle of whitish lime-wood; Lerrys was smoothing one of the rockers and Dith was carving a panel for the foot. He had made a wheel shape in the middle and all round it a curved trumpet pattern in high relief, then curls and small circles that formed the tips of wavy triangles, and spiral bosses at the corners; between the raised parts he was rubbing the wood with blue dye; he wanted to have a different colour for each panel, but Lerrys wouldn't let him: "It ought to be all the same," he said.

"But it would look fine, Lerrys! I couldn't have got the colours in Britain, but here one can get everything. There's a stall in the market with red and yellow and green and—oh, every sort and all so bright! People don't use it enough down here."

"You only like it because you've never seen it before. Let me look at your panel. What's that you've done on the bottom?"

"That? Running horses—the Three: for luck."

"They're not very like horses."

"They're not meant to be. Things oughtn't to be like. That big place you took me to see—what was it called?"

"Oh, Pompey's theatre."

"Yes. Well, those figures there, they were like; but it was awful to see them, they shouldn't be allowed!"

"I think they're beautiful. They're gods and goddesses."

"Then all the more reason not to make them that way! It's not right. You mustn't make things; you must make something instead of them, like we do in Britain. It may be quite different, but it's really them when you once know. Can't you understand, Lerrys? Meromic understands. And I don't like the buildings: all those straight lines."

"They look very strong."

"Yes, but you could build them just as strong and not so straight; I'd put patterns on them, and colours."

"Would you? I think you'd be wrong. Look at that,"—he held up the rocker—"it's smooth and simple and it does what you want it to do. But I like your carving all the same, and Coisha likes it too. I wish I could carve myself."

"I learnt when I was little. You have to grow up with it, and partly worship it, I think. I made my own shield; that's bronze work, but you get the same feeling when you do it. I wish you could have seen my shield."

"Yes. But it ought to be a fine cradle."

"It ought to be a fine baby too. But, Lerrys, there's a lot about this city I don't understand. They make things straight, but they live crooked. And we—we make things patterny, but we live simple. Why is it?"

"I don't know. There's more like that too. Here they build great, fine palaces with thick walls, and yet there's sunshine all day; and in your island, where it's always raining, you live in mud huts."

"We make very good houses!" said the Briton indignantly. Then Lerrys got up to light the lamp, and

Coisha brought over her spinning, and glanced at the cradle, smiling to herself.

* * * * *

And things were happening fast in Gaul. The Hæduans were coming over; they had made up their minds at last. Gergovia had decided them: Vercingetorix was the winning side. They called him into their own territory to consult with them, and he went very willingly, though some of his friends were afraid of treachery. He was half expecting what happened: the Hæduan chiefs and magistrates demanded, as the price of their arms, that they should take over the generalship of the Gallic forces from him, and give it to one of themselves. He had his answer prepared; he said he would submit to the ruling of the Council of the Chiefs: let them assemble it where and how they pleased. His own indignant followers would have had him reject the proposal outright, but he knew better; he would have the common will behind him, and then the Gods would be favourable. So the Hæduans summoned the Gallic Council to meet in five days at Bibracte, in the heart of their own land, a steep, windy town, full of metal-workers' forges, and horse and slave dealers.

It was a brilliant, hot day that brought the thought of victory; the people of Bibracte ran out from all their houses to see the chiefs come riding in, armed and helmeted. First came the chief magistrate of the Hæduans, the head of the state; then came more Hæduans, and among them, their guest, the Arvernian King; he had bidden his friends keep away, all but Lucter of the Cadurci, from whom he hid nothing.

After them came more chiefs, dark Aquitanians, big fair Belgians, men from Aremorica—two chiefs who had escaped the smash of the Veneti—Gutuatros of the Carnutes with his belt of Roman hair, and at the end the Arvernians, with Vercassivellaun, the King's young cousin, a good leader himself, riding at their head. Caltane was one of the last; he had no power now, though Vercingetorix always had a good word for him; one arm was bandaged and he looked less triumphant than the others; but yet he was not really unhappy: his own defeat mattered little if his cause had the victory.

For half a day they talked in the assembly; the Hæduans saying that they had always been first among the Gauls and they should be first still, that the war would have dragged out endlessly if they had not come in, and that their chiefs were as good as the Arvernian; they said that it was right that every state should lead by turns, and now their turn had come; they spoke of gold and land at their disposal. But the assembly broke up into impatient shouts, demanding to vote at once and lose no time. Vercingetorix leapt on to the speaker's block. "Who is for me?" he cried, but all the time he knew, he knew! He heard the shouts all round him, saw the drawn swords, his to command. "And who against me?" A voice or two from the Hæduans, but even those died down before the hostile silence or hisses from the rest of the chiefs. In a moment he was the centre of a wild rush, they lifted him on their shoulders, and he shouted with them, hugely content. He felt hot hands clutch

at his own; he looked far out over Bibracte and the Hæduan lands: these, too, might hail him King!

The Hæduans took their oaths to him, gloomy and reluctant; but it was too late now to draw back; even if they went over again to Cæsar he would never trust them after this. And more than one was not unwilling to swear faith to this tall young general who promised them such fine things, and they, too, thought of a united Gaul. So Vercingetorix rode back out of Bibracte and down the Hæduan valleys full of young corn, the chosen of his nation at the height of his happiness, and proud—too proud when it came to dealing with Cæsar and Labienus and their Roman legions at bay.

* * * * *

Meromic had fought, he had killed his own countrymen; by that shed blood he was bound again to Titus Barrus. He was too busy to think much, now that he had all his master's things to see to, and marched and drilled and worked with the auxiliaries as well. There were very few Gauls left with the Roman army, only a little band from the Remi and Lingones, who had always been faithful to Cæsar; but even they went about shamefaced and uneasy now, and besides, they kept to themselves and didn't choose to be friendly with a stray Aremorican. The new horsemen from across the Rhine had come in, yelling and waving their swords; they had been remounted on army horses, as theirs were too small and light, and one had been taken from Titus. But Meromic had no wish to know these Germans: they were even older enemies to Gaul than the Romans, and then, he couldn't

speak their barbarous dialect. He saw most of the Balearic slingers, wild, hairy little men, who drank rough wine of their own and gambled furiously with their pay; and some of the legionaries, too, respecting him as a fighter, were quite ready to like him.

But mostly there was the growing friendship between him and Titus, more than ever since Lerrys had gone. After the armies had rejoined there was a little breathing-space; they camped among the friendly Lingones; all round them were armed and hostile tribes, but they did not dare to attack the whole strength of Cæsar. The midsummer days went by slowly, with no sure news, but hundreds of rumours; morning and evening were busiest, but at noon the lines lay quiet under long trails of smoke from the camp-fires.

One day, when it was hottest, Titus lay in his tent, looking at some sketches of siege engines; his armour was piled beside him, and there was a water jug within reach. His shoes were off too, and now he unpinned the shoulder of his tunic to get a little cooler; his bare, brown arms were scarred here and there from slight wounds. Even for a Roman it was very hot in the tent, though outside it was worse still; he hoped there would be a breeze soon, and turned over, sweating, on to his back, and dropped the sketches; and wondered what his promised Æmilia was really like, and when, if ever, there'd be a chance of seeing her; he wished there was a girl with him now—the only thing he could think of in this heat. Then Meromic came in, remembering, for once, to give the Roman salute with his sword; he sat down on the ground and

Titus pushed over the water jug; the sun had blistered him across the back of his shoulders and neck and he looked rather tired.

"You ought to cut your hair," said Titus. "You'll get sunstroke if you don't."

Meromic drank from the jug and loosened his belt: "There's a man just come in from the South," he said.

"What news?"

"They say *he's* got fifteen thousand horse from the Hæduans."

"Is it true?" asked Titus, knowing that "*he*" meant Vercingetorix: for some reason Meromic never wanted to say the name.

"I think so; it's likely enough. Will he attack us, sir?"

"He'll be a fool if he does, now that we've got those Germans; and he's not often a fool. But of course he mayn't know about them. Had the man any other news?"

"More about the Province: that they're rising too."

"All the chiefs bribed, I suppose. Well, if the Province goes, we go. I wish I knew if you'd like that, Meromic."

"I wouldn't let you be killed without being killed myself."

"That's good hearing. But it's no answer to what I said. Do you want Vercingetorix to win?"

"Well——"

"Yes. That's it, isn't it? I wonder the Remi keep loyal, even. And yet our rule's not hard; we treat a people better than its own kings do. And the things we bring with us: trade and peace and prosperity, good

roads and good laws: they ought to weigh a little."

"There's liberty in the other scale: it's heavy."

"But what is liberty? Liberty to be oppressed. But you don't care so long as it's your own chiefs! We don't interfere with you, we leave you your religion and your customs and your councils; it makes no difference to a poor man where he pays his taxes. And if you want to fight, we can give you good fighting and good pay, all over the world: in Asia and Africa, along thousands of miles of frontier! Isn't that good enough?"

"Not for a free man."

"It ought to be."

"Maybe. But even the Hæduans see it's not. And all the Romans aren't like you, either. It's what I told Lerrys just after you had us——"

"What is?"

"About you. That it wouldn't matter if they were all like you; we'd take you for our kings—willingly. At least, I would. But they aren't. And perhaps it's just as well."

"I'm not as good as you think me; I wish I was. I'm one like a hundred others. But I'm glad you do think it, all the same. There goes the bugle—my armour, Meromic!"

Cæsar set out for the Province; it had been wonderfully faithful on the whole, but could he expect that to go on if he was not at hand to protect his friends and punish his enemies? He moved quickly south across a range of hills and down a valley, with his huge baggage train trailing along with him. Scouts brought the news headlong to Vercingetorix where he

waited in the Hæduan country, and he moved east with his infantry and all those new hosts of horsemen, the pick of Gaul: if Cæsar reached the Province he might yet come back, and come back stronger; they could not attack the legions directly, but they could and would cut off the baggage train and leave the Romans to starve without it. The leaders of the cavalry gathered round him; many of them were newcomers, who had brought in their men after Bibracte, and these were most of all anxious to have one great blow at the enemy under the eyes of their General. By the red altars they pledged themselves, every man, to ride twice through Cæsar's lines, or never see home or wife or child again.

The next morning they swept down on the marching troops, a thunder of hoofs, a shock of steel, a vast, yelling crowd with Vercingetorix himself heading them, reins loose and lance in hand. Then suddenly the German horse came round on their left flank and drove them sideways down the hill. And they lost the battle, and Vercingetorix fled for his life, north-west up the passes and into Alesia, leaving three thousand of those eager horsemen dead on the battlefield.

And Cæsar pressed hard after him, feeling his luck had changed at last, and next day he was over the hills and down on the other side and facing the strong fortress where Vercingetorix waited him. The hill of Alesia rose solidly, separated from mountain or plain on all sides, with two small rivers north and south and a flat stretch of low-lying country to the west. It was not so high nor so steep as Gergovia, but yet

too high and steep for even a victorious army to try the assault. Cæsar saw at once that there must be a blockade, and he set his men to ring Alesia round with trenches and camps.

For a few days there was desperate fighting all along the tangled slopes, and again the German cavalry won the battle for the Romans. The lines were being drawn ever firmer about Vercingetorix and his army: he was trapped, and badly trapped. Once more he called together the leaders of the cavalry, this time by night on the level top of the hill, from where they could see the circle of enemy lights all round them. He bade them go, each to his own country, and there call up every man who could bear arms and come back with them—quick, quick!—and save him and the garrison before the Romans could starve them out. They swore to carry out his orders, and by twos and threes they slipped out of the camp, and past the Roman block-houses where the lines were not yet finished, and up all the little valleys, and into the hills, and away to their own tribes to gather an army and bring Vercingetorix, the chosen of Gaul, safe out of Alesia!

Chapter 10: *Autumn,* 52 *B.C.*

"I wore the red and I wore the blue,
I wore the green and the orange too,
My sister Mary she passed me by,
And the Lord have mercy on the Croppy boy!"

MEROMIC had been digging all day at a great earthwork across the western plain, swamp and thicket, corn-land and grazing-land, all trampled into mud between the two streams. Even in summer there was water within a few feet of the surface, and every spadeful was heavier than the last; aching he wondered how long they had been going on, and when he would get anything to eat. He had never worked so hard as this in Rome, not for any beating; nor ever nearly as hard when they were building the new wall at the landward side of Rodec—he didn't know what work was in those days. But the legionaries were digging still, and he wasn't going to be beaten by them.

Suddenly a shout from the right; the diggers dropped their spades, seized swords and shields, and crowded behind the parapet on the near side of the ditch, waiting for the attack from the town. It came with a rush and a shout and a line of long, hungry swords; but the line broke at the ditch, and a cohort came up at the double from behind, to help the diggers. Meromic was not yet very well used to the short

Roman sword; a Gaul got in under his guard and he had a cut across the thigh that would stop him digging for a day or two—that was something. One of the legionaries helped him to tie it up and then said, "Look! That's fairly yours." For the body in front was clearly his killing, and it had a twist of gold round its throat. But Meromic, looking at the tartan, wouldn't touch it.

"He's from the North, from Aremorica: take it yourself."

"God, I'm not a waster!" said the soldier, and tugged off the gold with heel and hand.

It had been going on like that for days, and weeks: the Roman army digging itself in, with one line of ditch and rampart and palisade on the inside to keep the blockade firm round Vercingetorix, and another line, just as strong, to the outside, against the time when the relieving army would try to break through. They had all to dig and fight and get food and timber for the works; there was never enough of them; sometimes it seemed impossible that they should succeed, but yet unless they did Gaul would be lost to the Eagles and their own disgrace and death would be certain. Working like this, they should have had big meals of meat and bread to keep their strength up; but food was short and no one got more than the barest ration. Every day they expected the army of relief would be on them before they were ready; tempers were short in those days, and punishments fell heavily. Titus and Meromic both worked to their very utmost, Titus simply and directly, first because he was a Roman officer and under orders, and then because

his life depended on it, and then, besides, because of Cæsar and the new Rome; and Meromic unhappily, not daring to look forward to either ending, because this was how things were, and he had promised, and because what he did couldn't matter in this great business, and most of all because of Titus.

But if food was scarce in the Roman camp, it was far worse in Alesia where every grain of corn had been brought to Vercingetorix for safe keeping. Thirty days he had told the horsemen when he sent them out, thirty days, or perhaps a little longer if he was very careful: a week for them to get to their own countries, a week to spread the news and call the councils—but then how long would they be talking? Three weeks up, four weeks, the end of the thirty days, but still no sign of the Gallic army. The corn would not hold out—but it had to. The siege went on.

About the end of the third week Lucter escaped from the town. There was nothing to gain by his staying with Vercingetorix when he might be down in his own country, gathering the rest of his people for the relief. One man could always get through the lines at night if he was careful.

The gathering of chiefs at Bibracte had called up levies from all the tribes, not every man who could bear arms, but enough, surely, to relieve Alesia; thousands and thousands of horse and foot, far outnumbering Cæsar's ten legions; and the generals were the best in the country, only two of them were Hæduans. But it all took time; there had to be speeches and voting, and banquets with a strict order of precedence: while in Alesia the corn had come to an end. But

at last they started; what did it matter if they were late, when they were so certain of victory?

Caltane among the besieged knew this lack of food was weakening him, making him a worse fighter, and lessening his chance of life; but he never tried to bribe the distributers to get more than his own ration; partly, perhaps, that it needed a very big bribe, but mostly that he would never do anything against the wish of his General. Every day he went up on to the walls to look out north-west over the bare hills: surely they must be coming! Sometimes he would think he could see something, and there would be a rush to the nearest tower to lean out and point and whisper and wait; but there was never anything but mist on the hills and Romans in the valley. And soon there was no meat left, though that lasted longer than the corn, and the picked men of Gaul were forced to spend their time trying to catch rats and little birds to eat.

At last Caltane was called up to a council of chiefs; they met in the great hall of the castle, and most of them remembered how they had eaten there on the first few days of the siege: bread, great crusty loaves, and huge brown joints, oxen roasted whole, the smell of the gravy! They had known days when there was meat to waste, beef bones to throw to the dogs, great slabs of fat. . . . The speeches were beginning. Some shouted for an attack at once, on the chance of breaking through; a few would escape that way, and the rest could never find a better death: only let them do it now, before the hot blood was all starved out of them! Some would have had surrender at once, while they could still get terms from

Cæsar; but that would mean the certain end of freedom: sooner anything else, sooner kill and eat the old and sick and helpless. . . . And Caltane thought to himself: if I were hurt and no more good as a fighter, I would be glad to know I could help the others, even this way. Few of the chiefs cared to think of it, but yet they would do it sooner than bow to the Roman peace; only, let everything possible be tried first. Vercingetorix, who had said little as yet, now rose to speak: they must drive out the old men and women and children: the Romans would surely take them as slaves, and, later, if all went well, they would be recaptured.

So that was settled, and soldiers went through the whole town, dragging out all who could not bear arms, and barred the gates on them, and bade them go to the enemy and beg for their lives. And they stumbled down among the bushes, till they came near the Roman lines, and here some turned back and lay down like sick beasts in hollows of the hill, fearing death less than slavery. But many went on, women for the most part, with children too little to understand, and babies in their arms that they were bound to feed at any cost to themselves. They stood by the palisades, weeping and praying to be taken in; mothers had loosed their hair and bared their breasts, thinking that so the soldiers might choose them, and save them and their children. They knew that women must be scarce in the enemy camp, and hoped they might fetch their price in bread. A few were taken, but very few; for the soldiers were half-starved themselves; Cæsar forbade them to be soft-hearted, and set guards all along

the lines to see that his orders were carried out. So for the next few days besiegers and besieged had to bear the wailing of these outcasts who wandered up and down between the lines till they dropped and died.

Titus was unhappy about it, but of course he could do nothing. Late one night he woke to see Meromic come in from his watch with a boy baby in his arms and: "A woman threw him over right at my feet. Couldn't we——"

Titus started up: "No, no! How could you, Meromic? It's against orders, and I can't have anything to do with it!"

"But I couldn't do anything else. Look here——" He unwrapped the child, who lay still in his arms, too feeble to give more than the thinnest cry.

Titus held up the lantern to see him, all head and body, with white, shrunk arms and legs, and a bracelet of fine bronze loose on one wrist. He met Meromic's eyes over the flame. "I can't," he said, "I can't. I'm an officer, so I must obey orders."

"But what are we to do with him?"

"You took him, you must deal with him. It's not possible to help these people—I'd have done it at once if it was. We can't get food for another mouth. Take him away, Meromic!"

"I think I could give him enough to keep him alive out of my ration; only can he stay here?"

"No, he can't! At least—oh, you'll never be able, so it's no use trying!"

"I'd like to try, all the same. He's a Gaul, like me."

"But some one would find out if he stayed here. And I can't stop my men doing things and then do them myself. I'm sorry, Meromic, but he's got to go."

"Oh, sir, it wouldn't take much to keep a child alive, not a tiny child like this."

"More than we can spare. It's no good. There, he's shivering; cover him up and take him out."

"Oh, don't, sir, let me try! I've done something for you, I'm forsworn, I'm fighting against my own country! And it's not much to ask in return—a child's life. Do it for me."

"Oh, Meromic, I don't want to refuse you anything, but can't you see what you're asking?—it's my duty and I must think of that first—and—oh, I hate saying no! Don't ask me again!"

"You won't then. But what am I to do? I can't find his mother now. I'd better leave him outside the tent; you'll be doing nothing wrong then. But he may cry."

Titus looked away for a moment, then suddenly snatched up his cloak; his next morning's bread ration was wrapped in it. "Here, give me the child!" he said, "and be grateful—if you like."

They fed him with bread soaked in water, and a little meat, and for the next few days they both went short themselves; but the child died all the same—he was too bad when they first had him, and of course there was no milk.

But they could have had no time for him anyhow, after that. Because the army of relief had come. All through that day the exultant garrison fought to get

out, while from the other side their friends hurled themselves against the palisades. They had learnt much since the old days; now they had huts to move up for cover, faggots to fill in the ditches, and hidden archers among the cavalry. For moments they had the Romans beaten and driven struggling back behind their defences; but again the German cavalry swept out and turned the battle against the Gauls, and after such fair hopes Vercingetorix was forced back into the town.

The next day was quiet, but at midnight the attack came from both sides. Titus waited on his tower, watching the plain for hours before they charged; but at last he heard the yell and the arrows, and saw the grey masses ever coming fresh against them! He had great pikes ready in his tower to be slung into the thick of the enemy, and all night it seemed he was giving the order: ready, let go! and sometimes he must have been doing it himself, for the next day he found his hands blistered from pulling at the sling ropes. But he could only remember a tumult of dark hours and then suddenly the morning, and leaning out and taking a breath of pure air, and seeing the ground thick with fresh corpses and his own pikes sticking through them. Many were killed that night on both sides, but the Roman lines still held.

Another day of quiet, and troubled sleep for men dead-tired in either camp. But the next day the battle raged again, and desperately, terribly, when both sides had all to win or all to lose. Time and again Vercingetorix led his men to the assault; they clung and tore like wild cats, these grim, starved fighters. If

the relieving army had fought as well they would have broken the legions; Vercassivellaun led his picked men finely to save his cousin, but in other parts it was a different matter: the attacks were feebly led and feebly followed up. Perhaps the Hæduans had seen already that they had chosen wrong, perhaps even in that day of agony they were thinking of what terms they could make for themselves with Rome. All day it went on, and once the Gauls were almost through when Cæsar himself came with help and turned the assault. That battle centred itself more and more on the two leaders: Cæsar, the little, cool, darting figure in the crimson cloak, giving his orders quickly and clearly, and all alive, all thought, all energy, all hope! And, on the other side, Vercingetorix on the black horse, galloping, shouting, a flame of colour, mark for all arrows but touched by none, and here, and there, and leading his men like a young god, freedom and the heart of Gaul!

Meromic was up on the north-west, fighting for his life and driven back step by step. He had hardly time to think, but when he had he found himself hoping his enemies would break through. So long as he was killed himself. But yet when it came to swords and spears he forgot he had hoped for death, and fought inch by inch among blood and steel and the torn spikes of palisades; twice he saw Titus, but only for a moment; mostly he saw nothing but the man he was trying to kill. His throat was hoarse with shouting, but he never knew what; he only heard the battle all round him, a rising clash of sounds. He

could not tell what had happened till evening; then he saw the battle was over for the day, but did not know yet that this meant the defeat of Vercingetorix.

* * * * *

The night in Alesia, the sleepless night. Walking about the walls: the moon above the towers with thick clouds sweeping rapidly across it. Friends in the street, sleepless too: looks, but no word spoken. Something going to happen, but what? It was all coming to an end—Alesia, the battles, the councils, comrades and rivals, hunger and thirst and thinking, things that ought to have happened, Gods that should have been favourable, swords and lances and the love of men and women. Gaul to be a Roman province: the Hæduans. And Cæsar, the man whose friend he had been, long, long ago; he would see him again. And Rome. And the triumph. His lost kingdom. . . . But if he could save his army, his people that should have been? If he could buy their lives with his death? It was a new thought, he had to get used to it; it was so different from all he had ever thought before. Cæsar had a name for mercy; he would spare the army that had faced him. If their leader went to him: a good sacrifice. The Gods had hated his father; he thought he had won them over, but now he knew they hated him too; it was well he had no son to follow him. Dawn over the hills, grey dawn. And the day waiting him.

The chiefs met together again in the morning: for the last time. He offered himself for them to do what they chose. They sent their heralds out to ask Cæsar

for his terms, and waited, waited, not looking at one another, nor speaking much.

The heralds were sent back to Alesia, and the dazed legions heard from their officers that the end had come at last, victory was theirs, victory complete and final . . . the horror was over . . . soon they would go home . . . the men whom Cæsar had always known he could trust . . . fellow soldiers. But first they were to see the last act of the drama; hastily armour was polished, spears were mended, laurels were found to hang on the standards, double rations were served out all round—no need to hoard them now when already the corn wagons were beginning to come in from the east. Meromic went back wearily to the tent, to find the scarlet boots and cloak which Titus ought now to wear, hating the Roman soldiers, hating himself. He passed a group of prisoners, men from Alesia to judge by their starved faces, their hacked armour; they sat on the ground, chained together, Arvernians from the colour of their tunics. One was a noble, still wearing the gold bracelets that no one had yet had time to rob him of; he lay back with his eyes shut, tired out. Meromic started at the sight of him: "Caltane!"

At that Caltane sat up, and looked at him hardly, saying, "You here still! I thought you might show yourself a Gaul yet, but you've not even been man enough to run away!"

Meromic felt too sore to answer, but a legionary who knew him did, with a hand on his shoulder and praise he would gladly have spared: "Ah, it's not run

away with you, not after fighting a whole campaign with us! "

" You fought for them, did you! " said Caltane, and he spat on the ground and turned away.

" Oh, Caltane! " cried Meromic, " Caltane, it was a promise——"

But Caltane did not listen and the rest of the prisoners hissed at him, " Traitor! Traitor! " and he stumbled away.

He went on to the tent; Titus was there already and met him with both hands stretched out to take his, and: " Meromic, it's over, this nightmare time! We've done with it for ever. I tell you, Meromic, I've never felt so purely religious: oh, I could worship Peace now! "

But Meromic's hands were heavy in his, there was no excitement, no joy in the voice that answered him: " Yes, it's finished. You've come through safe. But I wish I was dead."

" Ah, why? Surely not now? " Meromic faced away, wretchedly, filled with the bitter memory of Caltane and those Arvernians, prisoners, but yet in how much more honour than he!

He said low, " My own people."

" But Southerners——"

" Oh, I can't think of it like that. They're my brothers and I've betrayed them: for you. My country —but it's too late. Gaul has been free: now—chains! " He tore his hands away from the Roman's and bent over the armour.

The legions were drawn up in line; Cæsar sat, bareheaded, wearing the purple robe and cloak, on his

raised seat at the front, with the Legates standing on each side and the Eagles crowded behind him. He waited, with nothing but a twitching hand to show how much it all meant to him. Quintus Velanius was whispering to Titus; they had been in place now for nearly an hour: what could be happening? Was this some treachery of the Gauls? The chill south-east wind swept towards them in whirls of dust; the clouds were tangled into brown wisps across the sky; the torn flags flapped sharply from the dark towers of Alesia. At last there was a stir at that far gate, a single high trumpet note. The legions stood stiffly, their shields locked and solid across their chests. Meromic, the fighter, with his spear grounded at his side, was in the front rank of the auxiliaries, next to the Balearic slingers; he stayed very still, but his teeth chattered and he did not heed when his neighbour whispered him to look.

Cæsar sat back in his chair, with the faintest catch of his breath, seeing that little group of horsemen riding down towards him through the scattered dead on the hillside. They came on along the twisted paths, sometimes with sunlight flashing on their armour, sometimes dim under a cloud, but always with that one figure in front, Vercingetorix the sacrifice on his black horse, Coré. They halted for a moment at the foot of the hill with every eye upon them; the chiefs behind, edging their horses close together, held hands and waited while their General went on. The black horse came slowly, stretching out his bony head; the harness of gilt and painted leather, with bosses of coral, hung loosely over sharp ribs and hollow flanks;

suddenly he neighed, shaking his great mane, and reared up at his master's voice, striking out with his fore hoofs. All through the army there was a little quiver of excitement: the King of the Arvernians was coming to Cæsar, not as a suppliant, not as an enemy conquered, but shining with gold and silver, with his great winged helmet and coral-hilted sword, the spiked battle-axe at his saddle bow, the Gallic lance over his shoulder. Titus, intent on the scene, saw him bend down to speak into the ear of the horse, which gave a great plunge and started towards them at a gallop, reins loose on his stretched neck, while Vercingetorix, leaning a little forward in the saddle, held up the lance high overhead, and gave one shout that shook the officers' hands to their swords, making them think of battles turned against them by the sudden coming of the Arvernian. Straight for them, nearer and nearer, a drumming of hoofs, that headlong galloper! The Legates pressed together, and Cæsar's fingers tightened on the arm of his chair. Then the horse swerved, almost slipping, and was away in a circle round the high seat; three times round he went, with the Legates half turning to stare, and only Cæsar still and looking straight in front of him. At the end of the third time, Vercingetorix, checking the horse a little, threw his lance into the ground with all his force; for a moment it quivered upright, then split all down the ashen haft, and fell.

Then he leapt clear off the black horse, one arm flung back to save his balance, and stood in the dust before Cæsar's feet, who still sat silent, chin propped in hand and breathing lightly. Along the legions there

was a stir and straight lines wavering, as officers and men pressed slightly forward, watching the surrender. For a little time, not more than a heartbeat or two, the Arvernian King stayed like a statue, like a bound victim. Then, as before an altar, he laid down first his battle-axe, shield, helmet, dagger and sword; loosing the buckles of his armour, he dropped that too, a heap of gold and iron; he bowed his head to take off collars and necklaces, the visible signs of kingship; then golden bracelets from wrists and ankles, then the gay-coloured tunic. Coré, the black horse, had come back to him and stood rubbing a soft nose against his shoulder; he turned and took the bridle; this, too, was part of the sacrifice.

Titus Barrus, watching, shivered a little at that grey figure of the Gallic General, not different now from any of his own soldiers, understanding how he had kept up his courage so far, acting his part, dedicating himself and everything he had as sacrifice for his people; yet at the end all that had gone from him, and he was left a beaten man in the power of his enemies. Vercingetorix knelt at Cæsar's feet, with his hands stretched dumbly before him; he was younger than most of the Legates, young enough to be Cæsar's son; but his eyes were like an old, worn man's and the white hair showed among the brown. What a life it had been for nine months! He was a boy in winter, taking the burden of all those lives, the fate of his country, so lightly on his shoulders; it might have been twenty years ago: Avaricum was between that boy and this man, and afterwards Gergovia, the assembly of Bibracte, the triumph and then the defeat,

Alesia, the siege, the three days' battle, sleeplessness, hunger, infinite responsibility, failure the most ageing of all.

He waited centuries, seeing the purple edge of the proconsul's robe fraying a little against the knotted wood of the platform. The world stayed silent and absorbed; then Cæsar's voice fell on him, like cold water, like a sword; he crouched down under it. "You have been my friend; you might be my friend still, in peace and prosperity. Instead you chose to bring ruin on your country, disgrace and bondage on yourself. You have broken the sworn pact of our alliance, the Gods have punished you for that, and I shall see to it that the punishment is carried through to the end! You fool——" But Cæsar paused, thrown out of his stride, unable to make any of his points against this bowed head, this utter submission. The army was listening, everywhere would be ears for all he said, in Gaul, in Italy, in Rome, Pompey and then Cicero —his name in history! He looked down at the beaten enemy, this incredible achievement of his; he knew himself at last capable of anything: he had only to choose, use all of himself, and it was done! But the price?—his hours of agony and doubt, plans that had miscarried, attacks that had failed, the crowding ghosts of the dead soldiers, his friends and comrades: well, this Arvernian should pay, if all the other Gauls went free! The guards came forward at his crooked finger: "Take him away." They pulled the Gallic General up on to his feet, and hammered on the chains till ankles and wrists were bruised and bleeding: they, too, had friends to be avenged. Cæsar looked on, and

his grim, hard-mouthed officers; for this was war. And Vercingetorix, seeing the faces of his conquerors, knew there would be no mercy for him, now or in the future. They led him away and gave him food and drink. since they had been bidden to keep him alive; the arms and the black horse stayed behind: he was to see them again at Cæsar's triumph, after six years of prison.

After that, no one was much interested in the other surrenders; it was a different matter: many of the chiefs had been promised their lives—they might be useful later. Cæsar did not choose to remember the Roman dead when these were before him; he was conciliatory, he would not show himself too openly the master, their swords might be given back to them later, the chains were a necessary formality; they did not dare yet to ask about their General; besides, they knew, it was their shame.

By evening all was over; food had been sent to the starving garrison as soon as they had given up their arms; everything was quiet. It was rumoured that the Arvernian and Hæduan prisoners were being kept apart from the others, that they would be allowed to go free. Meromic heard it from two or three soldiers, who grumbled, but knew that Cæsar had made up his mind and there was nothing to be said. Caltane would be freed with the others, but where could he go, with Curdun in ruins, and Ardorix wishing him no good? Well, there was room for a strong sword still. Titus Barrus was having supper that evening with the rest of the tribunes of his legion; he would be there till late. Meromic went back to the tent and sat there in the dark, rubbing his hands up and down the tent pole,

not so much thinking as letting facts present themselves to him, one by one. Half-way through the evening two of the slingers came, with lanterns, and called to him to drink with them, but he shook his head.

Quite suddenly he made up his mind; it was as if he had been waiting for some final event which had come at last. He lighted a candle, took down the tablets that hung over his master's bed and wrote very carefully, hunching his shoulders up with the effort; he had had no need to write for more than four years, and not much before that. He found it difficult to remember how the letters looked; the words were Gallic, because that was how he was feeling, but he wrote in a funny mixture of Greek and Latin characters; sometimes he turned them round the wrong way and had to smooth out the wax with his thumb and try again. It took him fully half an hour to get his message down; it said: "I have to go. I have been faithful up to now. Have I paid you for what you did for me? There is another debt to pay; whatever else I may be I am a Gaul, so *he* was my General. I should have gone before; ask Lerrys if I wanted to. And you have come through safe: may you stay so. I think that Gaul is conquered for ever and Rome is the conqueror; but still I must go. If you are for home now, as I hope, we shall never meet. You know I am sorry. Till Lerrys comes back, take a Hæduan; they never hated Rome so much as we did. Your things are all put ready. My thanks for everything; I almost forgot; that was you. Do you understand? My thanks again. I kiss your feet. Mero-

mic." And he made a little outline of a wolf's head beside his name.

He cleared up the tent and put everything straight. He took his own sword, knife and axe, and his blanket, which was an old one that had belonged to Titus, strapped on his back. He picked up the tablets again and wrote another message at the bottom: "If you forgive me and if you see an Arvernian prisoner, a chief called Caltane, tell him so; I may see him some day."

He left the tablets face up on the bed, blew out the candle, and went. The sentries knew him and let him pass, thinking he was taking a message. He slipped easily through the outer lines and into the open country; he was not sure which way the Gallic armies had dispersed, but at least he would get clear away by dawn to some place from where he could see the lie of the land. While there was light enough he climbed up through the pines, till the curve of the hill hid the Roman camp-fires, and he was quite alone and safe; then at moonset he lay down and slept, rolled in his blanket.

Titus Barrus came back from his supper tired and happy; seeing no light he thought Meromic was asleep, and felt disappointed because he was too much excited himself to be at all sleepy, and wanted to talk to the Gaul. He hung the lantern up, meaning to wake him, but he was not there. Titus called him, once, twice, and a third time, impatiently; and sat down on the bed, drumming with his fingers on the armour plates of his kilt. All at once he saw the white of the tablets by

his pillow and picked them up with a casual glance that turned to frowning earnest as he held them under the light. It took him a few minutes to get the import, but then it was clear enough. Meromic was gone, there would be no catching him. He was gone for ever; they had marched and fought and lived together and shared one another's thoughts: it was all over as if it had never been. And what did Meromic think he was going to do? There could be no war after this amazing victory, no vengeance for Vercingetorix. Unless the rest of the Gauls felt like this too? But that was impossible; already the Hæduan chiefs were sending in to try and make terms for themselves, and the men from Alesia would not fight again. Titus stood, fingering the tablets: if only he had come back earlier! He knew he could have stopped Meromic; and if he had kept him then he would have kept him for always; there could never be such another critical day. And afterwards he would have brought him back to Rome, where there would be no more wars to tear him two ways at once, and they would have lived happily ever after. And now—he looked at the little drawing of the wolf's head: that was it, of course, the wolf side coming up, untamed after all this time, the side that Titus never quite knew, never quite reckoned with: this was the barbarian boy he had seen first running with the hound pack over his father's land. . . .

The next morning he told Quintus Velanius, who hardly believed him at first, and then offered to share his own servant, and reminded him of the time Meromic had gone away before on his own business. But

Titus knew this was different. When he had time he thought of sending the message back; the Arvernians were all more or less together. One of the prisoners was glad enough to earn what would buy him seed corn when he got home again, and found Caltane and brought him along to the Roman officer, who looked him up and down with keen interest, this last link between himself and Meromic, the thick-set hill-climber with his steady grey eyes. After a moment he asked him:

"You know a man called Meromic?"

Caltane assented, cautiously.

"I want you to give him a message, if you see him, from me—he'll know who I am—to say he has paid me well and I do understand and give him free dismissal; but tell him this too, that when he has no other hope, wherever he is, and whatever he may have done, to come back to me and be welcome. Can you remember?"

"Yes," said Caltane; "but I'm not likely to come near him. I'm no friend to him these days."

"He left a letter saying he might see you: I don't know where he is."

Caltane thought for a moment, then suddenly looked up: "He's run away at last, has he! But it's too late."

"That's what I think."

"And you're the one he wouldn't run away from. I see. But God knows what he wants to do now: after the end there's nothing. And yet I don't think it was because he was afraid of fighting that he didn't come before."

"No, no, he was never afraid of anything!"

"I don't think so either. He was a traitor to all I cared for, but yet he was a brave man. Well, I'll give the message if I see him."

Titus hesitated, not knowing whether to offer money or not; finally he did so; Caltane took the gold pieces in his hand and looked at them, saying: "Why are you giving me these? I'd tell Meromic your words anyhow. I'll take them all the same; there'll be neither home nor help left me after this. But I tell you, Roman, there's only one head fit to put on to gold and there'll be none after him!"

And Titus went back to his tent and looked again at a coin he had there with a galloping horse on one side and on the other that proud young head, half Greek and half Celt, the hero of a nation, the General who had so nearly driven them for ever out of Gaul, the prisoner lying in chains somewhere in the heart of the enemy camp, the man who had moved those two Gauls, Meromic and Caltane, as if he had been a God, the sacrificed Vercingetorix!

Chapter 11: *Autumn*, 52 *B.C.*, *to Spring* 51 *B.C.*

" Oh, may the fields that hide the hare
Hide well our hunted men,
As scattered rocks conceal the fox,
And smallest trees the wren,
As by the cart-wheel's crushing track
The skylark knows no fears—
In vain, God grant, may England hunt
The Irish Volunteers.

Oh, may the winter be a spring
About them where they hide,
Oh, may by night the stars be bright
Their silent feet to guide,
May streams with fish and boughs with fruit
Be teeming through the years,
And every field a harvest yield
To the Irish Volunteers."

From an Irish Song: Winter, 1920-1921.

IT was a marvellous feeling for Meromic, this waking up at dawn among the dripping bushes of that misty hill; it was as if he had been newly made, he had cast off all his past, he would not think of it, it belonged to some one else, he was leaving it behind with every stride up over the dew-soaked grass. What was ahead? He would have liked best to join the army of Vercassivellaun, that gallant young cousin of the General's, who had so nearly broken the Roman

lines on the last day; but he was a prisoner and his army would most likely be scattered. After all he might be best with the Aremorican folk: there might be a friend or two there; perhaps Louaven had come over from Britain. Only it might not be too easy to explain where he had been: better, then, to go to strangers.

He climbed up above the mist and knelt a moment before the risen sun; as he got to his feet again and turned, he found himself facing a Gallic soldier with bloodstains on his armour and a drawn sword in his hand, who demanded to know who he was. Meromic decided, on the spur of the moment and thinking the man looked a Southerner, that he himself would be a Venetan who had lost himself in the battle and did not know where his own army was. "You'd best come with us," said the other, "it's not safe to be alone on these hills so near the enemy."

"Who are you?"

"I'm from the north bank of the Garunn, in Lucter's army; we've arms and food for any true man there. Will you come?"

Meromic made up his mind quickly; he had heard much of Lucter and his Cadurci; he would go. They went together down the other side of the hill into the mist again; the man, whose name was Gell the brown, was not in the least suspicious and very friendly. He was less depressed about the battle than Meromic thought any one could be; the men of the Cadurci had attacked on the whole successfully; he had never even seen Vercingetorix—all his loyalty was for his own general and chief, Lucter—and besides, he had

killed four Romans and taken their swords as a trophy, not having had time to take their heads. At this Meromic showed his own Roman pattern sword and invented a story of how he, too, had killed his man. It was all so different from yesterday!

At the camp he was sworn in and told what his duties would be; Gell offered him a corner of his shelter for the night, and they ate their rations together. Meromic did not say he could speak Latin or knew anything of the Roman army—the last thing he wanted was to be sent back as a spy. The second day he saw Lucter riding over to a council, a fine figure of a man, with a great brown beard, a helmet crested with sea-eagles' feathers, and a very long sword in a scabbard of scarlet leather.

They retreated south-west at once; the chiefs and generals who were left, Lucter and his friend Drappes, Gutuatros, Comm and the others, had all decided to repeat the old plan of Vercingetorix, separate Cæsar's legions and destroy them, if possible, one by one. But nothing could be done yet, it was no use staying near Alesia any longer, and they went off towards their own places.

Meromic was by now quite used to being on his own, with his name and reputation to be made again, his friends to be found, his old memories to be stored away and not touched too often. At first he caught himself thinking of Titus Barrus a good deal too much for his peace of mind; he had to remind himself that from now on Titus, if he was anything, was an enemy, one of those who were holding Vercingetorix captive, some one he ought to hate: this he could never do,

but at least he could forget him and the last three years. Lerrys must be forgotten too, Lerrys who had been his friend when he was most alone and miserable; but Lerrys had Coisha now; and Titus would marry his Æmilia—would it make up to him, though? And would any one else ever make up to Meromic for his lost friends? But there was plenty to do by winter besides all this remembering.

Lucter wanted to wait as long as possible in his own territory; the winter-quarters of the legions were none of them very near, the closest some way further east, a menace, but not at all pressing. But his army had to be fed, and this was not too easy; besides, they were always clamouring to go off and raid the neighbouring countries, and Lucter had not always the power to stop them. So, late in November, he was glad to have the chance of satisfying his men and also putting into practice his old leader's policy of harassing and ambushing the Romans without ever making an attack himself with all his forces. There was fighting in the north-east: the Carnutes, as usual the first to start a rising; it would be well to help them by diverting the attention of the legions which were quartered among the Ruteni, some fifty miles away, across a couple of ranges of low hills. The first thing to do was to get the Romans into the open, so one of the chiefs was sent out with his men to burn a Rutenian town, carry off their cattle and women, and incidentally murder an Italian trader. The magistrates of the town of course complained to the Legate in command, and a legion was sent off to clear the honour of Rome and protect her subjects. There was only one way they

could come, through a gap in the hills with a burn swirling in brown spate down the middle, and pine-woods on each side, all scattered with big boulders and fallen trunks, and brushwood along the sides of the path. There had been a fairly heavy snowfall in the hills, and the last thing the Romans expected was Lucter's army; but they did not know that further west the fall had been very thin, nothing to stop a small and hardy body of men from marching light, with their meat driven before them on the hoof. And the Ruteni were more friendly to the invaders than the Legate thought; the town was a frontier town and quite used to being burnt from time to time, and Lucter had secretly promised them compensation for their cattle.

Meromic had been waiting, crouched behind his rock, for three or four hours; they had had to come round and down very carefully to get into their ambush without marking the snow, where every footstep showed sharply distinct on the blue-shadowed white; there were a few flakes falling from time to time, but on the whole it was blown smooth or into little crested ridges. He was rather happy; he knew that Titus, if he was not back in Italy, would be three hundred miles further north with his legion, so that was not troubling him; and he had much to revenge. His sword was well-balanced, his lance-head was firm on the haft, he was longing to run with great strides down the clear slope in front of the rock and fling himself on to some one in the path; he stuck his hands into his armpits to keep them warm and supple for the sword play.

It was getting late in the day when they heard the

legion marching towards them; Meromic knew their song so well! The head of the column marched past between the innocent snow-banks; sentences floated up, a laugh, a curse, the fag-end of a story; they meant nothing to Gell, but Meromic felt queerly dizzy to listen to them. Then, cutting through it all, the whistle, the leap up and over and at them, a Roman face, large and astonished, hands vainly trying to push the lance away, the jerk as it went through, blood on his arms, and his head clear again. The column had been cut through the centre and disorganized for the moment, but the ends were forming up again, two solid fronts with the legionaries throwing darts from behind their shields; Gell had one in his arm, but shook it out, not much the worse. Meromic was down in the bed of the burn, up to his knees in water, but sheltered by the bank; he called to some of the others, they might as well wait till the Romans had exhausted their weapons, and not be killed needlessly.

This was all very well, but the shower of darts and small spears went on, and the Gauls were attacking madly; Meromic could not very happily keep out of it, besides he was in an extremely cold place. He looked about for a moment, thinking what fools his fellow-countrymen were to try to force these locked ranks instead of clearing off after the first attack, when the path was strewn with Roman bodies and they were practically unhurt, and waiting for another good opportunity. Instead, they were making these futile charges and wasting their strength; Meromic had seen it all from the other side many times. There were obviously some archers in the centre of the squares,

but not many; equally obviously they were holding their fire in the square that had been formed by the head of the column, so that it seemed likely that the mules or carts with the fresh supplies of weapons would be behind. Meromic managed to get hold of Gell and a few others, and hastily told them his plan; they hurried down the burn, quite hidden by the high bank and the bushes between it and the path. As Meromic had hoped, the supplies of arrows and javelins were carried by mules, all tied head and tail so that they would follow the first one. The Gauls climbed up out of the burn, and got together on the bank, looking to Meromic for the word; he led them forward with a yell; they were on to the drivers with their swords, but they were only a few against many.

Still, there was a very thorough confusion; the mules squealed and reared and got their legs over the tie-ropes; the driver of the first, wounded on the head and half blind, but still at his post, heard a voice behind him speaking good Latin: "I'll take charge now; you get back." The man gave over the bridle thankfully to this new-comer. The mule snapped at the stranger, who dodged him and scrambled on to his back, upsetting the pack of arrows, and kicked him with a hard heel as he plunged; at this the mule gave a buck and started off, wheeling round and lashing out to the side as he felt the bit pressing over. In a minute he was away down the path he had come up, with squeals and kicks and wriggles, but no getting the rider off his back; the others followed him, biting and striking every way with their wicked little hoofs. The drivers tried to cut the ropes that tied them to-

gether, but between the mules themselves and the attacking Gauls they had no chance; and none of the darts they threw at the rider had brought him down.

Half a mile off Meromic pulled his mule round and up on to a steep track that twisted through the pines; he flogged the leader on till he got to another path which skirted the hill on a higher level, above the thickest pines, and turned along that and so back to the old place. Here he tied up the sweating mules and shouted to the men below; this new supply of weapons was as welcome to the Gauls as its loss was bad for the Romans. The second square, which was depending entirely on the mules, wavered visibly; the Gauls swept on to it and broke the ranks. Meromic was in the thick of that charge; he heard himself shouting "The North! The North!"; he felt himself a tearing wolf. But as he tugged his sword from a dead man's throat he saw it was dusk, there were no more enemies, only the Gauls all round him, wiping blood off their faces, helping their own wounded, stripping the Roman dead and dying.

But for that coming of night the whole legion might have been cut to bits; as it was, the Legate escaped with half his men, back down the glen, to send for help and wonder nervously whether the attack would be followed up. It was not, of course; the Gauls were much too much pleased with themselves and what they had done already; they wanted to stop and drink and talk about it. Lucter would have made them go on, but he had not enough authority over the chiefs, and, besides, even he could not quite realize how thoroughly

he had disorganized them; the most he hoped was that it might draw down some of the Roman troops from the North, and so help the Carnutes.

Meromic wiped his sword, and sat down, suddenly very tired, and surprised at finding that he had a deep hack on one shoulder that had just missed the vein: the edge of his deer-skin cloak was stuck in it. He was rather sore all over, and looked at himself carefully: the mules accounted for the horse-shoe shaped grazes on his thigh; he had had an arrow in his back, but the arrow was out, so it could not be bad; one arm was a little cut and his face was covered with blood from several big scratches, perhaps made by the pine boughs. However, his shoulder was the only one that worried him at all; it was getting stiff and he couldn't reach it easily himself. Just then Gell came up with two or three heads, which he carried by a finger hooked into each of their mouths, and a silver belt over his arm.

"You've made your name this time!" he said. "They want to see you in the evening; remember we helped you."

"Were any of you killed?"

"Not one; as soon as you were well away we cleared off into the wood. A bit cut about, that's all. You don't seem to have got hold of anything much, though" —he swung his own trophies.

"No. . . . My shoulder's hurt. Will you help me?"

"Surely," said Gell, and they bathed it in snow water by one of the camp-fires, and bandaged it with

fresh moss and linen, while the heads gaped at them from the ground.

Later on Meromic was called up before Lucter and the chiefs; he was pleased with himself; he felt that all this blood must nearly have wiped out his old shame, that he was fit to be the Wolf again. He was enjoying it all: the crisp snow underfoot, the sky prickled with hundreds of stars between the pine branches, the clean dressing on his wound, the stiffness of his sword arm, and Gell and the others envying and admiring him. In the fire-lit shelter of hurdles and boughs, Lucter and his companions sat together on logs covered with otter skins, drinking and planning and watching the pile of helmets grow in front of them. Meromic came and held out his sword for Lucter to touch the hilt; he told his story with applause from all; Lucter bade one of his men see to it that Meromic was given a good horse and harness, and pulled off one of his own bracelets and clasped it on Meromic's arm, saying, "That's for now; go on as you've done, and when Gaul is free you shall have a better reward. You're a Venetan, they say: who was your father?"

"Kormiac the Wolf; he was one of the Council."

An oldish man started up from behind Lucter: "Kormiac of the Islands! Why, I remember him as well as if it was yesterday! And you too—a boy you were then, always sailing in your boat, you and that pretty little sister of yours. I thought you were killed in the battle of the ships; let me look at you!" He laid both hands on Meromic's shoulders: "Yes, yes, you're the same boy, and a fine young man you've

grown up to. The Pride of the Islands they called you in those days. What's been happening to you since that summer? We heard you were dead."

"I was wounded, but not killed. I had to surrender. . . . I won't say any more!" He looked round defiantly at them all.

Lucter shook his head, smiling at them: "No, no, there's no need to tell. The past is past. We know what it is to be in the hands of the enemy. There's more than one of us here who's been a prisoner. There comes the Arvernian; he was taken at Alesia: he understands."

Meromic turned to see this new chief who had come to join the others; the Arvernian looked at him; they both stayed still and staring.

Caltane spoke first: "What are you doing here?"

"I'm a soldier: ask them what my service is!"

Caltane turned to the chiefs and Lucter himself answered for Meromic.

"Very well," said Caltane. "I see he may prove himself yet, though it's a year too late. Meromic, I've a message for you."

"Oh, is it—is it—what did he say?"

"He said you had paid him, that he understood and dismissed you freely, and that you would be welcome back any time, whatever had happened, when there was no other hope."

"I knew he'd let me go. Oh, Caltane, my thanks for telling me!" He covered his face with his hands, wanting to laugh and cry both at once.

The old man asked suspiciously from whom the message came. Caltane looked hard at Meromic:

"You'd better all know. It's from a Roman officer, his master——" But Lucter stopped him, with "That's enough, Caltane," then to Meromic: "Was this what you wanted not to say? Ah well, I should be glad if none of my men had anything worse to look back on." So Meromic kissed his hand and went out with the bracelet on his arm.

Half-way through the wood he heard steps running after him in the snow; Caltane caught him up, panting, and said, "Shall we be friends, Meromic? You've got that three years to make good, but now they all know of it, so it's no matter. And I'm homeless; they only let me go with the chiefs because I was in Alesia. I'm a stranger among them, they don't wish well to an Arvernian, any more than you did, but Lucter, who is a good man, was a friend of my King and has me for his sake."

Meromic took his hand: "It's because of your King that I'm here; I'll be glad to be friends again, Caltane." And they went on together.

* * * * *

Titus Barrus went back to Rome; what ages since his last leave! Then, as now, he had been lonely; but not unhappy, and he had looked forward, instead of always back, back, like an old man. He saw his grandfather first, who was growing fat, and full of Pompey's return to the fold and the triumph of the conservatives. Titus felt crushed in that house, as if he had been a child again. His grandfather's friends were terrible; they did nothing but crow over their new laws, which annulled Cæsar's; they explained to him, elaborately and often, what had been happening

in the centre of the world while he had been away; they patted him on the back and condoled with him for having wasted so much time on this unsatisfactory Gallic war, which would never come to an end under that incompetent general. "If Pompey had been in command, now——" "Or my dear old friend Lucullus——" "Pompey would have had the whole place securely annexed by now, bringing in money to the state, instead of taking it out." Titus found it was quite useless to say anything; these old men could never understand what war with a free nation meant —they thought only in terms of the conquest of crumbling Asiatic kingdoms; so he shrugged his shoulders and let them talk; he did not feel alive enough to do anything else. For a time he saw something of a new group, men of his own age, or younger, poets and philosophers and what not; many of them in the old days had known Catullus, and like him they were adventuring along strange, un-Roman paths. But they found Titus a little too heavy for their taste: war had clipped the wings of his youth, he would never any more be able to fly with them to lyric heights; he could not see, as they did, the vast importance of a new metre or a new Eastern religion; he could not spend hours looking for the *mot juste*. They dropped him quite soon, and he was not altogether sorry.

He turned to Æmilia; he thought of his marriage as peace and quiet and the warm hearth, a soft place to drop into after all this fretting, out of the world at last, the best way to forget. She was young and shy and slender with black hair, coiled and pinned, and drooping eyes; she would hardly speak to him at first.

Sometimes he could not help comparing her with the strong, full-breasted Gallic women; this girl, in her straight, clinging silks, could never run beside a horse, nor swim against a foaming current, nor stand in her doorway with a spear, threatening the soldiers. Nor could this little shoulder pillow a tired man's head, these unskilled fingers and mouth and body set him at rest and make him fit to work again. Æmilia would obey her husband, never take the lead herself, always put the responsibility on him: and he wanted so much to do nothing! Almost Titus could have wished his grandfather had chosen him a wife out of this new set in the Capital, some one who was less of a lady and more of a woman: what did he care if she was unfaithful so long as she could sometimes give him back his old, untroubled soul? But there it was. And he married her with great ceremony; his grandfather's friends were all there, and one or two of the young Italian group, but Quintus Velanius was still in Gaul, there was no one he really cared for in all the procession—except Lerrys and Dith.

He had been glad to see those two; he had kissed Lerrys and nearly kissed Dith: they were so like they had always been! He told them how Meromic had gone; Lerrys had said very little in answer, and that clearly not what he was thinking; only he had bitten his hand so that it bled, because of his own friend Meromic, gone, too late of course, and alone. And Dith thought, with some little satisfaction, that the Gaul had only showed himself a double fool, first for staying and now for going, but wished him luck all

the same, and missed him—how full of strangers Rome was still, for all he had been there months!

Coisha had a tiny red-haired baby: "A little Gaul," said Titus, touching its soft, wrinkled fist, and let them call it after him. Æmelia interested herself delicately in it, and even made it a little coat, which Coisha admired, without quite approving. Titus always found it rather odd and inappropriate to see Lerrys with the baby.

About a month after his marriage he got orders to go North again: the tribes were up. His first thought was that Meromic was going to fight after all. Caius Barrus would have liked to go to Pompey and arrange matters so that his grandson should stay at home, but Titus wanted to go. Æmilia cried, and he comforted her as he might have a child, and kissed her good-bye; and Lerrys kissed good-bye to Coisha and his little son. Soon they were on the wintry road to Gaul; for the first day or two both husbands felt a little unhappy and uprooted, but after a week they were back to the old ways, with some laughter and much remembering of Meromic. Dith was useful, and he grew happier every mile they went towards war; if he had to be a slave, at least it was better to follow a fighting-man, to be dealing with arms and horses again, and not to have to speak low and behave decently, and wait at table among a lot of Greeks!

Cæsar was angry; he made up his mind that this must be the end; he moved his legions across Gaul as if they had been his own lightning thoughts, not common men. There was no great army to fight

against this time, no one general; it was a case of breaking up the armed bands, killing or scattering the chiefs, making prisoners in every village and family, taking every one by surprise, doing it all with extraordinary speed and leaving the Cantons gasping and submissive. But it was a gloomy business crushing out these last sparks of liberty; there was no glory nor excitement in it, and Titus found himself being haunted by hopeless faces of conquered Gauls: nonsense, of course—wasn't he doing Cæsar's work?—but there was nothing else to think about now, no one to talk to and drive it all out of his head; he had tried talking to Lerrys, but it wasn't much use, not when it was anything that really mattered. And there was rain almost all the time, drenching rain and sleet, and his horse slipping on the clay banks; and all the time he was afraid of finding Meromic.

But Meromic was far to the South, with Lucter's army; he and Caltane went about together now, and he was glad of it; he did not care to be alone much these days, and he was always happiest when there was fighting to do. He liked the longer daylight: it had been winter evenings that made him want his friends most. March came with violets on the banks, and he looked back past those four years to Spring along his own coast when Fiommar and he had gone out together snaring rabbits or scrambling about the cliffs, and had smelt the new air and praised all the Gods for it.

The life was not bad on the whole; they went from one district to another under the old standards of the tribes; where they got no welcome they plundered,

and perhaps burnt the chief's house. At first they had always been welcome, but latterly there had been a change: Rome could protect her friends or suppliants, and often Lucter and his people were put off with fair words till the legion came and they found their way barred. They did not care to fight battles, but whenever possible they would make a surprise attack, ambush a cohort on the march, or revenge themselves on an unfriendly town. And there was drinking and singing, and they had women with them or carried them off after a raid; they had plenty to eat, and good horses, sometimes they hunted and sometimes they had races where a man would lay heavy odds—his life perhaps, or his liberty—on his horse winning; they were always quarrelling, and two of them would fight it out with sword and dagger in front of the chiefs, while the drinkers looked on and cheered; and wherever they went they made the country folk work for them.

But it didn't do to think too much about it, as Caltane did, or to compare it with old days when the whole of Gaul was up and armed and eager behind Vercingetorix, days when they had followed the white star of freedom and every man was pledged to ride through Cæsar's lines, when they were all together, one nation, one hope, one goal! Lucter had known it, and many of the army; now they had fallen to this. And there was no hope for the future; they had to be living in the present all the time, and that grows to be a strain. For the first few months Meromic had thought, and Caltane had sometimes thought, that Gaul might yet be free and Vercingetorix might yet

be brought back in triumph; so many of the old leaders were alive; so many of the tribes were struggling hard against their bonds. But one after another the risings were put down; the Romans were everywhere. And Lucter's men grew to think of themselves not as a national army driving out the invader, but as rebels up against a fixed and solid government. And there was much divided counsel; no chief trusted another; Lucter could never be sure whether, just at the last moment, a hundred of his men might not refuse to follow him; he was certain of Drappes, but never of the rest; it was all very disheartening.

Every day they were joined by men on the run, fugitives, often, from the Bellovaci, that Northern people who were too proud to send help to Vercingetorix and now had tried to face Cæsar alone! They had been beaten—how could it be otherwise? Correus, their leader, was dead, caught in a trap he had set himself for the Romans. One of these new-comers had told it all to Meromic: here was the wood and here were the swollen rivers, here was the great water meadow where the legions had broken their attack and turned on them and hunted them up and down. He himself had reached the bank with an arrow in his neck, and dived and swum under water with his armour dragging at him, and from the other side he had seen Correus, who would not yield, swinging his axe and shouting to his men to come back: but they were dead or flying for their lives—"I couldn't face that river again," said the teller; "besides, I'd lost my shield. And he—he wounded any man who came near him, he was a wild bull among a pack of dogs; but at last,

when they saw he was not to be taken alive, they threw their spears and killed him and took his armour. And I am hoping now that your general will lead me to revenge him." But Meromic said, "You'll never get your vengeance. It's always too late."

Titus Barrus had been in that fight too; and later, when the conquered Bellovaci sent in their submission with many excuses, his work had been to deal gently with the hostages, young children perhaps, who were brought in white and terrified, thinking they were going to be eaten by ogres. And he or Lerrys or Dith would sometimes ask one of the prisoners if they had heard of a man called Meromic; but they never found out anything. Dith was getting restless; these men of the North were very like Britons, the language and customs were much the same; he talked to Lerrys, but Lerrys was very loyal to Titus Barrus, more than ever now that he had left a wife and child in Rome. Dith wished he could see Meromic again—he'd understand; Dith was rather bad at making up his mind, he liked to find an easy path somewhere between two opposites—a misty sort of mind, but he came from a misty country.

Many of the other tribes had been waiting to see what would happen to the Bellovaci; now they, too, sent their submission and hostages. But some of the chiefs had still to be dealt with, and most of all Ambiorix, the man who had betrayed to death the Roman army at Atuatuca, always the mischief-maker, always the raiser of revolt; there could be no mercy for him. Nor for his people when Cæsar found he was not to be caught. There were only a few of them

left after last time; they made no resistance, they were hunted like rats from one hole to another; the villages were burnt, and the corn-stacks that should have fed them in summer. But not many escaped to starve; the luckiest might be taken in as slaves among tribes across the borders, but the soldiers were not in the mood to keep their prisoners. This was not war, but reprisals—the thing most sickening to any decent man. Titus saw more horrors in a month of this than in a year of battles. He got to know just how quickly the blazing thatch pours off the cottage roof into a great bonfire in front of the door, just how the women inside scream and scream above the crackling roar, just how a child bursts through with hair and clothes alight, and then collapses and dies at the soldiers' feet: all this is bad for the memory.

And day after day they spent hunting Ambiorix through the green woods of spring; Titus had his heart in his mouth every time he saw his men with a prisoner; however much the people ran from them, now and then one would be caught, an old, sick man, perhaps, or some half-crazy woman; sometimes they wouldn't tell, more often they knew nothing, but usually they were made to speak before they died. Titus had very little authority over his men in these ways; it was not his fault, and they would have followed him to any attack; but discipline didn't go more than a certain way down, and among them were one or two who had been with Sabinus in that ghastly time when they had trusted twice to an oath of Ambiorix, and almost the whole legion, officers and men, had been cut to pieces, penned into the valley with no mercy given by the

Gauls. So Titus would get as far off as he could and try not to hear the cries. There were days when his grandfather would have been perfectly satisfied to know what he thought of Cæsar. But orders must be carried out.

Lerrys tried very hard to help; he knew all the time just what Meromic would have done, how he could have made Titus forget it for a little, but Lerrys was dumb, he couldn't do it himself. He was so anxious to make up for his lost friend that he paid no attention to Dith; and Dith had found out that the sea was not so far, that there were boats trading to Britain . . . and Dith took food in a bundle, and stole some of his master's money; early in the morning he went off, guiding himself by the sun among the tangled woods. In every little clearing the grass was thick and damp and dark green with its young sap; the birds sang among the hazels, and Dith picked his way in and out of the branches, as wild and quiet as a fox. He came on a path from one burnt-out village to another and trotted along it, swinging his bundle and listening for any noises from behind. And suddenly he heard a horse and crouched back among the brushwood to hide. The horse went by him, blowing and sweating, at a staggering gallop that dropped to a trot when it was not spurred. The man on its back had his eyes fixed in front of him; he spoke aloud in a strained, hoarse voice: "Get on, men, get on," but there was no one with him; his helmet had fallen off and there were twigs stuck in his hair and beard; his armour was rusting on him, his scabbardless sword was fastened through a twist in his belt, his cloak was

a torn, dirty rag round his neck. But Dith knew who it was and followed him to where the path divided and saw him plunge down the right-hand one and disappear; only the shaking boughs far ahead showed where Ambiorix had gone.

There were hoof-marks in either path, some that looked almost as new on the left-hand one. Dith was looking at them when all at once he heard more horses, fresh ones, and then a Roman voice; he began to crawl among the bushes again, but he could tell by the sounds that the pursuers were coming through the wood at each side of the path: better at least not to be caught hiding, he thought, and went back and stood at the fork of the ways and waved his arm when the horsemen came in sight.

"Which way?" cried the first.

"There, not ten minutes ago!" and he pointed up the left-hand track.

They galloped on in wild pursuit and Dith hoped he might be done with them; but then another man came up, on a lame horse; Dith repeated his story.

"Oh, curse my luck!" grumbled the man. "They'll get him, and I'm out of it with this devil of a mare of mine!" He dismounted, and saw it was the Tribune's slave he was speaking to: "Why, Dith! What are you doing so far from camp?"

"Oh," said Dith, "I went out to get wood; I was told not to cut it too near camp because you wanted it all, and I went on and then I got lost."

"Lost? I thought you islanders never got lost." The man looked at him suspiciously. "Well, any-

how you can come back to camp with me. Here, carry my pack! The mare's got too much as it is." And back to camp he had to go with the pack on his shoulder and black anger in his heart. Fortunately the man was in too bad a temper to ask him what he'd done with the wood till they'd gone too far to go back to where he said it was. It took them nearly four hours with the limping mare; half-way back the soldier who had been muttering to himself about his bad luck, suddenly glared down at Dith with an oath: "And you expect me to believe you, you——! "

Dith didn't answer and the soldier unfastened the reins from the bit and made him stand against a tree and beat him with the buckle end. Then they went on again, and Dith carried the pack under his arm so that it shouldn't rub against his sore back.

As they got to the camp the others caught them up with their horses tired out; they were empty-handed and they looked very grim at Dith; he would have liked to get away quietly to his master's tent, but they made him carry the pack along to their quarters, and stood round him.

"Can I go? " he asked.

"Not till we've done with you," said one. "You told us the wrong path—we'd have got him in another mile! Yes, you Briton, that's the sort of trick you play us: we'll teach you to do it again! "

"I didn't! " cried Dith, but no one believed him; he fell on his knees, still denying, terrified of these angry soldiers; if only he could get safe away he'd stand anything from his master or Lerrys! One of

them dragged him off by the iron collar round his neck to the space behind the tents where the flies were buzzing over the cooking pots.

The first one kicked him with his nailed boots: "Did you tell us the wrong way?"

"No!"

Then the second, and the third, and all of them; but he went on saying no because he knew they'd kill him if he said yes. He crouched down, trying to shield his head, but they pulled his arms away; he looked round desperately, he thought he saw—he yelled: "Lerrys!" And Lerrys came and stood over him, demanding explanations from the soldiers.

One of them told and "You'd better leave him to us, Lerrys. He was running away; we'll save you the trouble of dealing with him!"

Dith caught hold of Lerrys: "I wasn't! I got lost! You *told* me to cut wood well away from the camp!"

"Of course I did. Here, let him alone. I tell you, I should know if he was likely to be running away! Dith, get up and come with me."

Dith scrambled to his feet, but one of the soldiers grabbed him: "Oh no, you don't!"

"Now, what is the use of that?" protested Lerrys, trying to calm them down. "Do you think his master's going to be pleased if he's knocked about till he's useless? Listen, I'll find out myself what happened, and if all's not right I'll send him back to you. Isn't that fair?"

The men consulted for a moment: "Well, seeing he belongs to the Tribune——" And Lerrys took Dith off; the Briton picked up the bundle with the

stolen money and food in it; Lerrys saw him do it.

They said nothing till they were back at the tent; then Lerrys looked at him sternly: "Dith, you liar, you may thank me for saving your life. What's in that bundle?" Dith handed it over silently; Lerrys undid it and found the coins, his eyebrows went up: "So. Dith, you might be crucified for this."

"But you won't tell him?" Dith looked imploringly at Lerrys, who thought with a start that so might he himself have been five years back.

"I don't think so. But I'm not sure: your stealing the money. Now of all times. You'll have to take your punishment."

"What will it be?"

Lerrys put back the money before he answered. "I've got to stop this happening again. About the other thing: did you tell them the wrong road?"

"I did."

"Why?"

"Because—oh well, I've fought against the Romans."

"I see. So have I."

"Longer ago. Oh, Lerrys, what are you going to do with me?"

"The soldiers would like you back."

"Don't! Lerrys, I'll swear never to try it again. By the Arrow of the Shining One. You know that's not an oath one breaks."

"Very well. I'll take it. You'd better get on with your work on you won't have it finished by this evening. I must go and talk to the soldiers." He went

out and Dith started making up the fire, crying and cursing and thinking of green paths through the woods that went north to the coast. But Titus Barrus never knew what had happened and Dith never saw Britain again. And Ambiorix escaped; but his people paid for it.

The fate of the Eburones hung over some of the other tribes; the Carnutes were spared on condition that they found and gave up Gutuatros, the man who had started the rising sixteen months ago by the murder of Roman citizens at Cenabum. For a time he hid among friends, but they were so anxious to save themselves and their wives and children, that very soon he was betrayed, caught, and handed over mercilessly to the Roman General. Titus was one of the officers who stood by at the mock trial they held; he knew, and the prisoner knew, and every one knew, what the end must be. He supposed it was necessary, but he hated it all the same: the man must be killed, only why not do it straightforwardly without all these witnesses and accusers and ceremony, this long dragging out of the hours, all to impress the Gauls with the justice and mercy of the conqueror! He doubted whether it was doing that. Gutuatros himself was wearing out visibly under the strain; at first he had stood straight and proudly before the Proconsul, a chained lion; but with the end of the day and the doom approaching, he began to lose his nerve, his shoulders twitched, he looked in agony from one face to another, his hand was at his mouth, at his throat, at his forehead. At last he was led out in front of the prætorium, into the central way through the camp,

which ran east and west; he turned his head once towards the setting sun. There was a thin birch-tree growing at the side of the way, though most of the trees had been cut down; every little leaf was gold-touched in the glow; Titus looked up at it, away from the crowd, the space in the middle, the two posts driven into the ground with the collar between them.

They had him stripped, with his neck and wrists in the collar, this man who had commanded thousands; once there he could not flinch from the angry cries of the legions, could not look again at the sun, could not bite his hand to stop himself screaming under the rods. Titus edged away, wanting not to listen to the sounds, wanting to keep his eyes fixed on the tree. Only, now and again, he felt he had to see: the officers round him were flushed or white, Cæsar was speaking to his secretary, and in the middle there was more blood, the posts shook at every blow, the man was moaning like a sick animal. Another ten minutes: the sun was in the top of the birch-tree, there was a little dust blowing. The rods were falling still and the body jerked and twisted under them, but the eyes were shut, the head and hands drooped in the collar, no sound came from the lips. The collar was undone, the blood-streaked thing was taken out and laid with its neck on the block; the axe came over with a clear sweep and there were shouts from the soldiers. Quintus Velanius whispered to Titus, "Well?"

"So long as this is the last. I can't stand much more. Cæsar should finish with it."

"I hope so. It saves the rest of the tribe, perhaps."

"My men were yelling for it last night: they like

it better than the Games. It's hard to say what really decided Cæsar."

The group of officers broke up and went off their own ways; at the gate of the camp Titus saw two young Gauls standing together, one with his cloak up to his mouth. He would have spoken friendly to them, anything to bring back ordinary life again, but Quintus laid a hand on his arm: "Don't speak, Titus: they're his sons." Then they saw a messenger riding fast, and wondered where he came from: "Perhaps from the south."

"He might be; they say that siege is a hard business for Caninius."

"Uxeldun must be a strong town."

"Yes. Cæsar will have to go there himself, or it'll drag on till Autumn."

"Autumn. . . . I wonder what we shall be doing then. Come out with me as far as the river, Quintus."

"God, what an evening!"

"Isn't it? Look, there's one star——"

It was nearly two months before when Lucter and Drappes, with their own men and a collection of fugitives from all parts, had gone south to raid the Province; Caninius had followed them hard, and they dared not risk a battle. But Lucter was in his own country; he turned towards Uxeldun, clearing the farms as he went, of cattle and corn, and had his army secure there before Caninius could catch him up. Uxeldun was built along the top of a hill; on two sides the rocks went sheer down to the plain, on the other there was a steep slope, leading down past a deep, constant spring to a burn in a narrow glen full of bushes. Here,

before these wars, Lucter had been over-lord, and now the townspeople welcomed him back with cheers and flowers, though they knew well that this would mean a siege, and trouble, and perhaps death, to them and their households. And Caninius settled down in three camps, and waited to starve the town.

Lucter had been with Vercingetorix; Lucter knew what starving a town meant. He and Drappes went out by a secret way down the rocks, with all but two thousand of their men; they got in corn from all over the country, and the Romans never knew: none of the country folk would betray their old lord. It had to be brought back to the town by night on little mules that picked their sure-footed way along the cliffs; but the Roman outposts heard them, and told Caninius. Lucter was with the mules; he escaped, dropping from ledge to ledge, hiding in cracks among the fern, watching the Roman soldiers hunting for him with drawn swords; but there was no getting back to the town. The men who were with him were almost all killed; Gell fought till his sword broke off at the hilt, and then he would have surrendered; he knelt to them, pleading, with outstretched hands, but they pushed him over the edge of the cliff with their spears, and he broke his back thirty feet below over a sharp rock. Drappes and his men were attacked too, and taken by surprise; this time the Romans took some prisoners, Drappes among them wounded in a dozen places; Caninius kept him safe and had his wounds seen to, waiting for Cæsar to come.

The news was shouted up to the town by Roman soldiers; the leaders of the two thousand held a council

on it; there was amply enough corn and cattle left for them, now they were so few, but they were terribly disheartened, and some were for surrendering at once, on such terms as they could get, before Cæsar himself should come. Caltane spoke urging them to defend the place at all costs; they might yet tire the Romans out, and Lucter, perhaps, could raise another army to relieve them; besides, if they did surrender, what was left to them? He was thinking himself of Curdun in ruins, and many of the others were homeless too. So it was no surrender, and days went by, and weeks, and at last they heard that Cæsar was on the way—at any rate they were not despised! Meromic watched the new legions marching in, one clear evening, and thought: is he there, shall I see him? and wished his old life would leave him alone, and yet somehow hoped, and yet somehow feared. . . .

Chapter 12: *Summer and Autumn,* 51 *B.C.*

"Who fears to speak of Ninety-Eight?
Who blushes at the name?
When cowards mock the patriot's fate,
Who hangs his head for shame?"

The Memory of the Dead.

CÆSAR had put archers among the bushes all along the high bank of the burn; there was no going there now. They had only the spring: if that went—they dared not think of it. And Cæsar was advancing against it a great platform built of logs and faggots and rammed earth, and a high wooden tower. The weather was growing very warm too; after the day's work the men would have liked long, cool drinks, and to dip their hands and faces in fresh water. Meromic found himself dreaming of the sea almost every night; he would be going down towards it with Fiommar, he would see the waves coming in, hear the wet swish of them foaming up the beach, he would run down the sand, eager for the first plunge, but then something always happened, he was called back by his father, the sand clung to his feet, or the sea suddenly shrunk away to a blue gleam in the distance. Then he would wake up in Uxeldun and watch the night sky, like a cup of dark, sweet wine with star-dust floating in it, or see Caltane asleep beside him, frowning, and clutching with both hands at his blankets.

The fighting was soon nothing but a struggle for the spring; the tower was pushed so near that the soldiers in it could throw darts at the water-drawers, and a man would often come up with the water in his bucket red from his friend's blood. First there was no water for the cattle: they were killed and there was fresh meat for every one, but fresh meat makes one very thirsty; then there was only water for the combatants: the others might have it if they could get it, and more than one mother with young children was killed beside the spring. Water was any price, but the fighters had too little themselves to be able to sell it for gold or houses or a girl's fair body. The wife of one of the town elders said she had seen in sleep the goddess of the spring, who had demanded sacrifice; the sacrifice was chosen by lot; it fell on a young woman who went bright-eyed and garlanded to the altar stone. But still the tower came nearer.

They got together tar and pitch and feathers and wood shavings, tallow and resin, anything that would burn well; they put them in barrels, lighted them and rolled them down the rocks, rushing down themselves after and among the leaping, flaring things with yells higher than the flames and desperate spears to overwhelm the guardians of the tower. Behind them the women leaned from the town walls, cheering them on; the works caught fire, the tower itself was in a blaze! Meromic had his sword in one hand, in the other a great torch of oil-soaked flax; running hard, he shoved it into a man's face on one side and slashed with his sword at the other; he threw it and saw the wood catch all round. Then he defended his own bonfire against

the legionaries hurrying to put it out; his hair was singed half off as he wrenched out pieces of burning wood to throw; he felt the glorious shock of a bucket of water on his head, and while he fought he licked the drops that ran down his face. Then half of the tower fell over with a crash and screams from below. But suddenly there was a shout from the town; the Romans were attacking on the other side! They had to leave the blaze, to let the Romans quench it and even get the remains of the tower nearer in; there were so few of them to guard every side of the wall. They had hoped to draw much water that evening, but the legionaries were hauling up fresh timber for the works before the old ashes were cool. And they had used up everything in the town that would burn.

And something else was happening that they did not know of: Cæsar was making a mine through the rocks to tap the water at its secret source. Titus had been sent south to get hold of a gang of copper miners, slaves mostly and rather stupid at working a new kind of rock; but gradually the tunnel was pierced, deeper and deeper into the hill. Titus went in one day to inspect, with Lerrys holding a lantern in front of him; they stumbled along, bent nearly double; the walls were all jagged edges, the place smelt of miners and old smoke. They flattened themselves against the side to let some of the workers pass, dragging out hides full of broken rock from the far end. Titus found his helmet saved his head a little, but Lerrys was all bruises. They heard the picks round a twist in the tunnel ahead of them, and saw the candle-light streaming out softly from beyond a jagged corner of rock.

The miners were singing at their work, but Titus, fresh from the open, found the air heavy and thick. He spoke to the centurion in charge, who seemed to think they were getting near their goal: "Feel this, sir!" Titus laid his hand on the fresh-split rock of the working face and felt it trickling damp; even while he looked the trickle grew, the miners crowded round it, pointing and gabbling; the water oozed up under his feet, icy cold, till he was standing ankle-deep and felt it flowing. There were queer bubbling noises behind the rock, air sucked in and out with whistling and chill draughts that blew out half the candles, the trickle checked and gurgled and went on again more strongly. Titus found his way out, very muddy, and reported; in another hour there was a good-sized stream of brown water swirling out of the mouth of the tunnel, and the miners had no more to do. Cæsar waited for the town to surrender.

Of that two thousand left to garrison Uxeldun, less than half were left, and hardly any were unwounded. Late in the evening, when it was usually safest, Meromic and two of the others went down to the spring to fill their buckets; they were very careful, they went barefoot to make no noise, crouching behind the rocks, running across the open spaces, looking round over their shoulders at the dark menace of the tower. But oddly, no darts were being thrown at random, as they generally were even when the water-bearers were not seen. They got safely to the steps down, whispering their relief; and then—the man ahead gave a low cry, the other two ran down to him; they clung to one another, staring: there was only a cleft with damp moss

on its side, going down; in the still darkness they heard a sound as if the lost water was laughing at them from very far below. They filled the buckets with what moss they could reach, and went back to the town. Meromic found Caltane at the wall and told him. Caltane cried out, "But they can't, they can't, oh, it's not possible!"

"The Gods are against us; this is the end."

One man wouldn't believe them and went down himself, but soon it was all over the town. The leaders called the garrison together, under the stars, in the market-place: these were more than men they were fighting against, it was impossible to hold the place any longer, they must send out to Cæsar. Some of the townspeople who were left were almost thankful; anything was better than seeing their children die of thirst; but some of them and some of the fighters killed themselves during the night.

The garrison tried to make terms, but they knew it would be no use; they surrendered unconditionally; the gates were opened; the legions marched in. Women and children rushed up to the soldiers, begging for water; they were rounded up, and with them any men who had not borne arms, and taken down to the camp, to drink at the cattle-troughs and then be sold as slaves. The garrison had to pile their arms in the centre of the square, and wait till they were counted; some of those nearest the surrounding lines of legionaries were given water, but most stood there an hour and more with dry mouths and swimming heads. Caltane and the other leaders asked that they and their men might be allowed to stop and drink at

the burn before they were taken on to the camp; it was granted, and they lay in it, drinking and drinking, and letting it flow over them; a few were drowned this way.

Cæsar was determined that this should be the last fighting in Gaul; he had less than a year left now, and the country must be settled before he went, or all his work would go for nothing. Let alone that he needed a peaceful province to show in Rome. People there had begun to realize, since the publication of his book, that the Gallic War had been no light thing, and if he could now point back to order and security, a subdued and tranquil province, well then—so he gave orders that the garrison of Uxeldun should have their hands cut off and then be released, to wander about the countryside as an example to the whole of Gaul of what came to rebels against Cæsar.

Meromic and Caltane had been lying close together on the grass; they knew they must expect something bad. As they had been spared so far it was not very likely that they were going to be killed; besides, this was not Cæsar's way; probably they would be sold under the hammer; Meromic thought suddenly: they won't get so much for me this time! and began telling Caltane the story of how he had surrendered five years back.

"Did you feel this way?" asked Caltane.

"No; it wasn't so awful; it didn't finish everything. I thought I was hopeless, but somewhere in me I must have hoped. Now I don't."

"Nor I. It's never been like this before: not even

when Alesia fell and my King was taken. And yet I couldn't have believed then that there was anything worse in the world."

When they were told what was to happen to them they hardly realized it, accepted it as part of the horror, and saw with no new emotion the blocks and axes that were being got ready.

Titus felt it almost more, this calm preparation of pain for hundreds; he sat in his tent with teeth clenched, trying to read. By now he had given up hope of finding Meromic; he thought he must have been killed in some of the winter fighting: he had disappeared so utterly. As he had not got to stand by this time, he did not see the punishment of the garrison.

There were five blocks. As each Gaul was pushed forward, a soldier caught hold of him on each side and forced him down on his knees in front of the block; then his wrist was held on it; there was little enough resistance usually. They had skilled men and heavy axes, and mostly the hand would come off at the first stroke. Sometimes the prisoner would scream, and sometimes faint; anyhow the arm would be dipped into hot pitch and roughly tied up; this stopped bleeding from the main artery, for the moment at least, and gave the man a chance of recovering. They were left to lie on the ground after this, and some of the women from the town were allowed to take care of them and give them water and by and by help them over to shelters where they might sleep, if they could, on old hay and hides. Of course many of them died,

either from shock at first, or else later if the wound got poisoned or started bleeding again, and most of them had other wounds as well.

The first few had both hands cut off, the later ones only the right hand. Meromic and Caltane were lucky; they waited for their turn, smelling the blood in the air worse than a battle-field. They had, of course, been stripped of all their ornaments; Meromic was sorry about the gold bracelet he had from Lucter. He kept on clasping and unclasping his right hand, feeling things with it, bending the fingers up: how well it worked! He had never thought of it before as something by itself; it had been always part of him, his sword hand; now it was more like a friend who was going to be killed. There were three or four others in front of them still; all at once Caltane whispered, "You remember the message I brought you, Meromic?" He nodded. "Well, would you go back to him now if you had the chance?"

"I suppose I would."

"Have you asked if he's here?"

"No, and I won't. I don't think he's in Gaul even, let alone this camp. Besides—I've been free so long now; I'd rather die free than live the other way."

"You said he'd freed you."

"Yes, but it's not the same. If I saw him, perhaps —there, it's you—oh, Caltane!——" Meromic didn't want to look, he heard the chop, heard Caltane gasp like some one ducked in cold water; then it was his turn. He held on to the edge of the block with his hand; it was all wet with Caltane's blood. The axes were getting blunted, it took three strokes; he was

used to pain, but this was worse than most; he felt frightfully sick and fell over on his side, but he was pulled to his feet for the arm to be dipped and tied up; for a moment he saw his own hand still clutching the block, before it was swept off to the heap of others. He was pushed forward a few steps, and was with Caltane again.

For a few days they lay in the shelter; the man at Meromic's other side died, and Caltane was very ill; after that they were taken in by a friendly farm, and nursed by the women there, till Meromic was on his feet again and Caltane was able to speak and feed himself with his left hand. Here they heard about their old leaders: Drappes had starved himself to death in prison, though the Romans had tried to make him eat. Lucter had wandered about the country for weeks; at first he had done everything to raise an army to relieve Uxeldun, but soldiers were not to be had for love or money, and he was on the run all the time himself. He had gone from one to another of his old friends, throwing himself on to their hospitality; but that couldn't last for ever. Caltane heard with a groan that it was an Arvernian who had betrayed him at last and sent him in chains to Cæsar. He was thought to be still a prisoner, but he might have been executed; the farm people couldn't tell.

They stayed there till the end of the summer, when Caltane was fit to take up life again; they had no money, and their work was not worth much, and the farmer was poor. What corn and cattle Lucter had left him, the Romans had taken; they had to go. Meromic had been left-handed for more than a year after the

battle of the ships, and he picked it up again quickly, and was able to help Caltane, who was slow and still very shaky. They wondered what to do or where to go; they were no good to any one. At last Caltane said, "We'll go to Curdun. Ardorix can't be afraid of me now, and for the sake of what every one would say he'll give us shelter and food. You'll come with me, Meromic?" And they went off together, past the old remains of the mound and tower on the slope before Uxeldun, up the burn, past the camps, and then east along the roads to Curdun.

They had to beg their way; neither of them could walk far on these steep roads, and four times they lay out under bushes because they couldn't reach one village from another in the day. People were kind to them, and let them eat at their tables, and gave them a night's rest; but they did not care to be too kind. In one house Caltane had broken down altogether; his arm had healed badly, there were always little splinters of bone coming away, and this time Meromic couldn't get him on to his feet at all; he lay looking at the fire, breathing lightly and moaning a little. Meromic was not too strong himself; he tried persuasion, he tried to drag Caltane up, but at last he sat down heavily on the floor with his head on his knees, crying from weakness and tiredness. All the same the people of the house wanted to turn them out; Meromic protested, went on his knees, begging them by all the bonds of hospitality not to put certain death on his friend. In the middle of it all the whole cause of the trouble appeared: a Roman officer whom they had wanted to welcome without any reminders

to either side that there had been mortal war between them not so long ago. Meromic appealed to him and he of course said they should stay; so they did, and Meromic nursed Caltane as well as he could, until he was better and able to go on.

It was beginning to turn Autumn again, a wet chill Autumn that made their arms ache; they got to Curdun in a rain-storm, soaked to the bone. Caltane was all on edge, his teeth chattered and his knees shook as they climbed the hill together; it was so strange coming back like this. Half-way up they stopped to rest and look about them; it was very quiet; a man came towards them, driving a couple of goats. Caltane leant towards Meromic, gripping his knee, whispering, "I think I know him, I think I know him! Oh, shall I speak? Will he remember me?"

The man knew him before he could say a word, ran over and kissed his hand: "Oh, sir, you've come back, you've come back at last!"

Meromic was astonished; he never thought the old chief would be remembered like that. The man begged them to come to his house, and they went with him.

Little by little Curdun had been built up from its ruins; the walls were still battered, and there were charred stones everywhere, but on the old foundations new houses had been made, and life was starting again. There were less than a quarter of the old numbers, but still it was a beginning; they heard children at play, and, somewhere, a woman singing at the loom. They warmed themselves at the hearth-fire, while the man brought them hot milk and rye-bread and eggs,

and then his own and his neighbour's only change of clothes, while theirs were drying. Very soon it was spread about Curdun that Caltane was back again, and they crowded to the little house to greet him with good words and small gifts, that warmed his heart, and to ask if he would be with them always now. But he did not know what Ardorix would say to all this, and he was uneasy till he could see him; there could be no home for him here without Ardorix's consent.

In the evening Ardorix sent for him, and he went; Meromic wished him good luck, and waited, hoping for the best. He came back, two hours later, tired out, and dropped down beside the fire, covering his face with his hand,—no words for his friend or his host. Meromic was anxious:

"Did you see him? Was it all right?"

Caltane looked up: "Right? Yes, I suppose it was right. We're to have a house and food and clothes; if I catch him in a good temper and beg for it, perhaps he'll give us a horse. But oh, Meromic, I've knelt to him, I've kissed his feet, yes, and hers as well: those two who ruined me and Curdun! I've taken bread from his hands and thanked him for it, he who was a traitor to my King and all! I've promised to obey him. And I saw him laughing at me all the time, and she with her head in the air! And it's their children who'll be chiefs in Curdun! Oh, my God, Meromic, I'd die gladly if I knew they were all to die too!"

Meromic came over to him, whispering him to take comfort, that there was no knowing what might not

happen. Their host said nothing, but nodded comprehension and gave them the little wine he had, and offered Caltane his young wife, who blushed and came forward obediently; Caltane kissed her out of courtesy and thanked them both, but he was not ready for that.

The next day they went to their new home; it looked west from the edge of the hill; there were two or three rooms, half cut out of the rock, half built up from it. At first they went up to get their food from Ardorix's servants at his house, trying always to go when he was away hunting, or busy giving judgment, or with guests. But, after a little, they found that food was being brought to them by the Curdun people, and not only food but hides, cloth, ornaments, knives; they would have given Caltane a great sword in a bronze scabbard, but he knew Ardorix would hear of it, so he could not accept it; besides, it would be little use to him now. Then there were horses found for them when they wanted to ride, and willing grooms as well, and they could have their choice of twenty girls. It was mostly the poorer people who came to him, the old defenders of Curdun and a few who had been with him afterwards; the traders and landowners cared less for their old chief and more for what Ardorix gave them: friendship with the Romans, the settled peace of a province, and the chance of a market in the south again. But a few of them, and a few of the chiefs from roundabout, who acknowledged Ardorix as over-lord, but yet had no love for him, came secretly, by night perhaps, to the house in the hillside.

Caltane took care never to seem at all prosperous to his cousin; he went about the town on foot in an

old cloak, and bowed low whenever he saw him or his wife; and indeed he did not look the sort of man any one could be afraid of any longer; he was all bent up over his arm, he was very pale, and it took him all his strength to walk up the steep streets of Curdun. Ardorix and Guemoné had very nearly refused to let Meromic stay in the town when they found out who he was; they remembered the scene in the Roman camp too well. But he was as weak as Caltane, he, too, had to be humble to them, and it gave them a certain satisfaction to feel he was in their power, a thin, grey wisp of a man, swordless, landless, childless, with his life all broken to pieces and nothing to look forward to.

But the days went on and the common people followed more and more after Caltane, and sometimes, from the back of a crowd, there would be hoots and hisses for Ardorix. Guemoné grew anxious first, and began to hint to her husband that Caltane would be better out of the way. She was beautiful still with her soft throat and blue eyes as she sat on the high painted seat in the hall of their house, with three children playing round her, the eldest always with that scar, and a new baby in her arms, and Ardorix was still apt to do what she wanted. Only that day she had heard from one of her maids that an old chief, nominally under the lord of Curdun, had been going to Caltane's house; and she knew well enough about the rest. She spoke low, rubbing the baby's hand against her cheek, " I'm frightened. Dear, I'm frightened. They're going over to him, like they did before. Once is enough for me—you know—don't let it happen again."

Ardorix stood over her, with a little frown: "What's to be done, Guemoné? Think what they'd say if I turned him away now! "

" You should never have let him in."

" But he *is* my cousin; we played together as boys. And—oh, he can't do any harm the way he is: he might be an old man already with that walk and that face he has! "

" He's not an old man. And that friend of his—oh, Ardorix, I don't ask it for myself, but surely we should make Curdun safe for the children! "

They both looked at their children; the two boys and the little girl were playing with the hound puppies in and out of the legs of the big table; they were so happy, so careless, and suddenly it seemed as if those one-armed men had grown to be a great menace standing over them, ready to spoil their play. Ardorix kissed his wife and said, " Well, I shall take care. If they abuse my hospitality—I shall send for Caltane."

And so he did; Caltane got the message and said he would come at once; the messenger went back. Caltane took up his cloak, saying to Meromic, " They're beginning to find out. What shall I say?"

Meromic thought for a moment: " It all depends on what you want to happen."

" I should like to have had a year's rest first. Do you think there's a chance? "

" I don't know Ardorix, of course; but they love you here."

" It would mean fighting. If I had my hand—— Well, I'll know more by to-night." And he went

up. He did his best with Ardorix and Guemoné, but it was no use denying what they knew; he was given the choice, either to send back all the things he had been given—"We'll give you as good," said Guemoné scornfully—and publicly to swear his loyalty to his cousin, or else to leave Curdun at once and for ever. Ardorix stood in front of him, tall, definite, backed by all the powers of a chief and a friend of the Romans. At last Caltane said, "Very well, Ardorix, I'll give back the things. But I warn you the givers mayn't be best pleased."

"That's nothing to me. You will take that oath to-morrow in the market-place. Now you can go."

At the house he found Meromic, and with him a few of those who had welcomed him most. He told them; they looked at one another; said one, "He has the strength: his own fighting men. And the Romans would help him. Curdun has been burnt once."

"Yes," said Caltane, "I think the gifts must go back."

They talked till far on into the night; the end of it was that they—or some of them—would follow Caltane against Ardorix if he chose, but they thought the odds were heavily against them; it might have been different if he had been with them another six months, or if he could have had money enough to bribe the traders and those who stood for Rome; as it was, half his friends would be afraid to help him. Caltane promised to send them word by morning, and they went out. He turned to Meromic. "This is clear. I've brought war on Curdun once already. Then it was for Vercingetorix; there was no choice, if

I could have chosen. Now it's different; I can't be the means of death for all these good men and their children."

"But yet—you might succeed, Caltane."

"What then? The Romans would never let me be. I've had enough war."

"But if you could get power: think what a vengeance you could take on them! After Cæsar is gone."

"It's too late; it was too late a year ago. No, I'll not think of any new fortune for myself now."

And he told those who had been there that evening that there was no need to sharpen swords for him.

He sent back the presents and took the oath to Ardorix, and after that he would hardly move out of the house. He seemed to feel his arm more, too; perhaps that was the wet weather, the mists that came right up the hill from the Curdun river; or perhaps it was simply the reaction in his body as well as his mind after that brief hope-time. Meromic was very unhappy about him; he did not care to talk; he lay awake for hours at night; sometimes for a whole day he ate nothing; and he seemed never to be able to get warm. When he did go out he crept up the sides of the streets and looked away and didn't answer when any one spoke to him. But yet all the same Ardorix was not satisfied; once his fears had been roused at all they were difficult to quiet. One morning Caltane was told that his cousin wished him now to live up at his house; he stood looking out at the raindrops splashing on the mud outside: "He's hard to satisfy," he said, "this cousin of mine. I think he might have

left me here. He'll not be content to keep me in his house either; there's a prison underneath in the rock; no one escapes from it; that's where he really wants me. Oh, Meromic, I've not brought you luck! "

He went out bareheaded into the rain; after an hour or so Meromic went to look for him, thinking he must be wet through; he called him all about the hill, but there was no answer. A man had seen him on the river-path, so Meromic went down there, along the banks of the river which sometimes ran shallow over stones, and sometimes swirled in deep pot-holes. He called and he called, till his voice was hoarse; he went up the glen and then down. It was getting late in the season, but there were still nets across the river in one bend; Ardorix always took half the fish. Something was pushing at the net near the middle, a log perhaps. Meromic looked intently, but the rain on the surface of the water made it very hard to see. He had to make sure, he waded out, steadying himself against the rope of the net; he got to the middle, three feet deep and a strong current, but a firm bottom to stand on. He reached down and pulled his friend clear of the net, and dragged him along and up on to the bank. Water streamed out of his hair and his clothes; he was cold already. Meromic knelt beside him, saying aloud, " Yes, you're very wet."

He did not know what to do; there was no one about, and he sat down by Caltane's head, with the grey river pouring and pouring past under his eyes. He could not go back to Curdun now. He thought of his own Canton, he might go north; but it was so far, so dim, he did not want it any longer. There

was nothing he did want. He wished he could be dead by somehow just not going on living; he had no knife, and it would be very hard for him to drown, good swimmer that he was. He looked round him; there were nets and a coil of thin rope heaped together in a little cave in the bank. He took up the rope and made a slip-knot with his left hand and teeth; he put the rope over his arm; he said, "Good-bye, Caltane," and would have laid flowers on him, but there were none in that November wood.

He had to find a tree he could climb easily; he had done no climbing since Uxeldun and it was going to be difficult. At any rate it was hopeless to try these pines; a mile or two further on—what did it matter? If there was any life after death he could come back and find Caltane. But it was not life he wanted. He went on along down the glen till he came to the road that went south; there were old thorn trees by the sides of it, with birds picking at the berries. He slung his rope across his shoulder, thinking what would be a good way to climb; he looked up and down the road: there was a man coming along it, and he thought he had best wait till it was clear again. He sat down on the bank; it was wet and cold, and started sharp pains in his arm and all his old wounds. For a little the rain stopped, then it came on hard; it was near sunset now, and the western clouds were just streaked with dull red.

"A wet evening," said the man, "but maybe it'll be clear to-morrow."

"Maybe," said Meromic, but he didn't think so, he only wanted the man to go on and leave him.

But the man stayed in the road: worse, he sat down on the bank too; he said, "That's a strong bit of rope you have there." Meromic didn't answer, turned his head away: but the man talked on: "You'll be a rope-maker, perhaps? Or is it for tethering cows you have it?"

Meromic glared round at him impatiently: "What's that to you?" Then he stopped, looking at the man: "Why, I've not seen you since—since that night in the wood. You gave Dith a silver ring: have you ever had it back?"

"I didn't miss it."

"Didn't you? It was a fine ring. What have you been doing all this time?"

"Oh, I've been about the world, a night on the hills, a night on the plain, a night over the sea."

"You look as poor and thin as ever you did."

"Ay, do I now? And you're not looking so rich and grand yourself. If you stay sitting on this bank all night you'll be washed away by morning."

"I'm not going to stay here."

"And where will you be staying then?"

"Somewhere you've no call to follow me."

"There's no road I couldn't follow you if I'd a mind: sunset or sunrise, south to one sea or north to another."

He pointed each way and Meromic's eyes looked along his finger; the queer thing was he saw a poplar growing right in front of him; he didn't remember seeing it before. And another up the road; and another down the road; and another behind him. And not a thorn-tree in sight! He rubbed his eyes: surely

he'd been sitting under a thorn! There was no climbing these poplars, but he knew he had been going to climb when that story-teller came. And oh, he was so tired, he couldn't get up and go on walking down this endless road looking for thorn trees when there weren't any!

"Well," said the story-teller, "it's time I went on; I never stop long in one place." And he went splashing away, and all along the road there was a flutter of birds among the bushes. But Meromic did not look after him; he sat on the bank at the edge of the road, nursing his arm, and the rope lay beside him on the grass, and the yellow poplar leaves fell heavily, sticky with the wet. And he fingered the end of the rope, but he felt too tired to go on: if only he could die at once! A half company of legionaries went by, marching at ease and talking, as if the whole country was their own now; he hated them dimly, but all his thoughts were turning grey like the evening. By now there was only a little light in the west; the fields had lost their colour; there was a drizzle of rain on head and back, but he was so cold already that it made no difference: he was aching all over, pains in every joint and muscle, his wrist a focus of solider pain; he shut his eyes, nearly fainting with it all. His mind clutched back for some support in the dark and wet; he remembered scraps of poetry, half a verse with the rhyme gone:

> There was a king of Fach-na-Croich,
> He had one only daughter,
> And she was dancing roundabout—

but Fiommar was dead under the short turf on Crabland, and their father was dead, and all his friends were dead and the rain was wearing down the stones over their cairns. The rain. The rain. The end of the rope was sodden and fraying out; his hand was resting in a cold pool, but it was not worth while moving it.

There were horse-hoofs along the road, blurred and stumbling in the mud; they came nearer, with a jangle of armour; there were hands on his shoulders, voices, voices . . . he did not know how cold he was until he moved. He looked across the lantern flame at the dark face under the straight line of the helmet, Titus Barrus calling him, out of a dream, "Meromic! Meromic!" He did not answer, it was too difficult to think of anything to say. Trouble gathered in the brown eyes in front of him, almost tears: "Meromic, don't you know me?" Then Lerrys saying something, and a cloak flung over his shoulders, the warm feel of the wool. He clung to the rope-end as they got him to his feet; he slid into a saddle and swayed there when the horse moved, yet was too good a rider to fall, however little he thought of riding. He felt leather in his hand instead of rope, there was a horse and rider at each side of him: his body was in the saddle, but his mind went on ahead in one piece with the horse's ears and the stones of the road streaming back faintly across the patch of lantern light. The movement woke new pains in arms and back and legs; the rain beat sometimes at one side, sometimes at the other; a rabbit ran in front of them, leaving no more trace in his consciousness than on the darkness. The

horse-hoofs clattered hollowly on flagstones; then the sound ended; he had got used to its going on for ever. He walked straight in front of him; some one stopped him from walking into the wall and guided him through the door.

He was in a room, in a chair, by a fire: he blinked at it; they were moving beside him, holding a cup to his lips. He drank; with a jerk he became alive again—warmth, light, rest; he was eating bread soaked in hot wine. He looked round; Lerrys was kneeling beside him, rubbing his feet with a dry cloth; Titus Barrus was standing with a bowl in his hands, smiling at the moment of recognition; Dith came in with an armful of logs: just the same. Titus was speaking: "Are you remembering, Meromic?"

His tongue fumbled with "Yes" and brought it out.

"That's good. What happened to you? What were you doing?"

"I was looking for a tree. . . ."

"A tree?" Lerrys caught the Roman by the sleeve and whispered to him; he bit his lip and offered the bowl of wine again: "Where have you been? You weren't at Uxeldun?"

"Yes. That's why . . ." he moved his right arm. Already this glorious warmth was creeping all over him, tingling, turning pain into glow, building him up again; he saw the Roman face full of pity and regret.

"If only I'd known! You went away to the rebels at once?"

As he was answering it all came back to him suddenly: the year of freedom, Lucter and the chiefs,

Caltane his friend—why had he let them catch him again? He started to his feet, swaying,—out into the rain, back to freedom, and his own death if he chose! But they caught him by the arms, it was no use. He fell back into the chair and crouched down in it, hiding his face in the cushion.

"What is it, Meromic, what is it?"—that was his old master speaking.

He answered weakly, "I don't want to come back!"

Titus and Lerrys looked at one another; *they* wanted him, but it was like trying to keep a wild beast, a wet, hurt wolf. Dith, kneeling by the fire, jabbing it to a blaze, turned with a twisted grin and a nod towards the hunched figure in the chair: "I know. He's got free this time; he's not going to stick his head into the noose again."

"But I freed him!"

"There's not much difference—is there, Lerrys?"

Titus waited for Lerrys to answer, and Lerrys cried with a gasp, "Yes, it is different! I swear it is! Only —only—it's thirteen years since I've seen my country: I've forgotten what it was like being free. And it was awful all that time before—he only had a year of it—and then you were kind to us! But I know what he's feeling too."

Titus rubbed his knuckles against his forehead: "I see. We shall have to go gently with him. I'm sorry, Lerrys."

"Oh, don't, sir! There's nothing for you to be sorry about. And I want him with us again. I hope you get him."

Titus went over to Meromic, who shrunk away

deeper into the chair, but he had the sense not to touch him. He spoke gently: "Meromic, listen: I'm not going to keep you against your will. Do you want to go back?"

Meromic looked round: "You'll let me go?"

"If you want to. Do you?"

Meromic got to his feet slowly: they all stood back; he leant against the chimney-breast and kicked in a half-burned brand; his damp clothes steamed, he wanted to take them off and get dry, and eat, and sleep, and forget about Caltane and Uxeldun and the wet road; he shook his head and said, "No."

They were all round him then; his eyes were narrow and he started a little as he felt their hands on him; they talked all together. He heard Titus saying, "Oh, I'm glad! You'll be my friend from this day on—we shall be happy again!" and Lerrys murmuring his name over and over, and, "Oh, my dear, I did hope we'd find you!" and then suddenly Dith with his eyes blazing, "You fool! You fool! Don't you know when you're free? Can't you tell? You've let them catch you—oh, you'll be sorry for it some day!" But now he was not sorry, and Dith subsided with chattering teeth into a corner. Then they had supper together, and he heard about Æmilia, and Coisha and the baby; and in the middle of it all Quintus Velanius came in, and he said, "Well!" and shook Meromic's left hand; but they all kept rather carefully away from things that had happened in Gaul during the last year or so.

Titus was very anxious to get Meromic right away as soon as possible, but they had to stay in the Arver-

nian and Hæduan countries for some weeks longer. It was enough to show Meromic that this time it was a real peace; everywhere the Roman was the good comer. Men were glad to be able to sow winter wheat and be certain that there would be no war to snatch them off before it was ripe; women knew there would be no more running from burning towns with a baby clutched to the breast, their husbands were safe now. Maybe it was the quiet after a great storm; there would still be gusts from time to time; but the chiefs were beginning to look towards Rome, to be dazzled by that great name. Later, when they and their lands were rested, they would fight with her, not against her. And it was all Cæsar's doing: in the end he had held out a hand of friendship, and Gaul had taken it.

Chapter 13: *Summer, 46 B.C.*

"... When those dead men are loitering there
To stir the boiling pot."

Yeats.

AFTER his grandfather's death, Titus Barrus had sold the house in Rome, which he never much liked, and had settled down in the country to farming and bringing up his children. He had almost dropped out of politics; the Civil Wars were over and surely there must be peace now for a little! He watched the slow growth of the olives; he imported fruit trees and skilled labourers; he used to ride round his estate with the bailiff, looking at the crops, with a word or a nod for every slave he passed; he would spend a whole afternoon discussing a new strain of wheat, or the blight on the vines, or the best way to stack the vetch and bean harvest. Æmilia, too, had a flower garden, with a little waterfall, a stream meandering through scythed lawns, small wooden bridges, and a path bordered with water-mint.

He had come in late one day, after being out since daybreak, and found his wife cutting long branches of oleander from the tall bushes where the evening sun still rested. Under an arbutus-tree by the edge of the stream his two children were playing with their nurse and a maid; he heard their high little voices

across the lawn, and smiled. Æmilia came to him with her arms full of branches: "Where have you been to-day?"

"I've been over at the Twelve-Acre; there's a cow sick; she's the one I got up from Sicily."

"Oh, Titus, not that pretty gentle creature with white on her face?"

"I think we shall save her. They've not done so badly this year, on the whole."

"It makes all the difference having you back to look after the place yourself. Did you get your dinner there?"

"No, dear; I went over and had it with Lerrys. He's just bought a new bit of land down by the marsh, and he's draining it; it should make a good vineyard in time."

"Are they all well there?"

"Oh yes; I found Coisha in the kitchen making some of those delicious little cakes of hers; you never give me anything half so good!"

She laughed: "You know you only like them because they're Gallic; if I made them and said they were Greek you'd think nothing of them! I suppose the baby's beginning to walk now?"

"Yes; you should go over there some day soon; they'd be so glad to see you. I had a great game with the little red-heads before Lerrys came home."

"Ask Coisha to bring the two eldest here one morning, Titus. It's so nice for the children to have them to play with, and she always keeps them beautifully clean."

"I will," he answered, and called across the garden,

"Caius!" The little boy came running over, with a small sister trotting after and tumbling and picking herself up again. Their father reached up and broke off a twig from the cherry-tree with five dangling cherries; the children danced up and down, with their fat brown arms stretched, crying, "Me! Me!"

"Oh, Titus, do take care of the stones!" said Æmilia. "You really oughtn't to give the children these new-fashioned fruit of yours!"

"I like the stones; I want them to plant in my own garden!" said Caius determinedly, and got the twig; he took two cherries and gave two to Lælia, who squashed them up with a broad grin, and licked the juice.

"Who's to have the odd one?" asked Titus.

His small son considered: "Well, I'm the biggest——" Suddenly he broke off and ran across the lawn: "You have it!"

Meromic ate the cherry and Caius tugged him along: "Come and play horses!" He wore the tunic and sandals of an Italian; there was nothing to show the difference but his height and fairness, and one bracelet of worked bronze on his left arm. Titus called to him and he came over. "Well, have you seen Dith?"

Meromic nodded: "Oh, yes, it's just like I thought."

Æmilia raised her hands in a gesture of half-amused annoyance: "What *has* Dith been doing this time?"

Her husband explained: "He's only been fighting again—with the head ploughman. What was it about, Meromic?"

"It wasn't anything really. They'd had words

about a horse, that was all done with. Then Dith picked up a whetstone and threw it at him."

"But why? What did he say?"

"He said because it was a hot day. Anyhow, that started them; I'm afraid the man won't be fit to work for a day or two, and Dith's got a cut head."

"What's to be done with him, Meromic?"

"Nothing. He'll always be like that; you'll never stop him fighting."

"If he had any reason——"

"Oh, if you're looking for reasons! I told him he oughtn't to do it, but he doesn't mind what I say nowadays. He's just pleased because he got the best of it."

"Well, I suppose it's no use my doing anything. I wish you'd try and make it up with the ploughman; Dith'll get a knife into him one of these days."

Here Caius, who had been fidgeting, interrupted: "Do come now! Father, I want him!"

"Bedtime!" said Titus. "Off you go!"

"Well, then, we'll play horses as far as the house."

"Very well," said Meromic, "who's the horse?"

"Me—no, you! Trot, my horse, trot!"

Æmilia picked up her Lælia and followed them in; the nurse went after.

There was a stone seat by the oleander bushes; Titus leant back in it, watching the primrose light behind the wood to the west; two late bees rose heavily from a sunflower and flew straight past him towards the hives; in the stillness after the children had gone, he heard the petals dropping from the big orange lilies

behind the seat. Meromic came back from the house, brushing past the clipped rosemary and stooping to smell it; Titus beckoned to him: "You're looking tired, Meromic."

"Am I? I'm feeling it too; but I think most of the hot weather's over now." He sat down on the grass, and flipped with his finger at a little green beetle that was walking through it.

"We're getting old," said Titus. "When one thinks what one meant to do with one's life! But I'd live it over again all the same if I'd the chance. Would you, Meromic?"

"There's a lot I'd change. I don't feel very old though, only—oh, I don't know. That little statue there: oughtn't it to be mended?"

"Meromic, can't I help you at all?"

"No; I'm happy enough. I like seeing the children grow up; Caius is nearly a man already."

"You ought to have boys of your own." The Gaul was silent, looking at the ground. Titus went on: "That's what it comes to in the end: a wife, and children to follow after one, take one's name."

"I wonder. I don't think my children would bless me: little lone wolves with no pack and no hunting!" He turned suddenly and laid his hand on Titus' knee: "You're going to Rome, aren't you? Will you take me?"

"I'm only going for a week—for the Triumphs."

"I know; I want to see them."

"There's not really much to see; you wouldn't like it."

"It's just the first day I want."

"Why? That's the Gallic day; you'd hate it. There's no need to wake all that up again."

"Just one bit of it."

"What? Meromic, if you want to see Vercingetorix led in chains, I'm not going to take you! Who told you he would be there?"

"I guessed. What are they going to do with him? Can't he be let go now? It's so long since."

"I wish they would, but I can't tell. Meromic, you mustn't go; it does no good to any one. I don't want to at all, but I have to." He got up with a little shiver: "Let's come in. It's cold."

"And nearly dark."

Two days later, Titus Barrus went to Rome. There was a great deal he regretted; Cæsar had changed much from his old general of the Gallic Wars. He did not care for Triumphs and such, either; it would be different, perhaps, when his boy was old enough to take. But he was always glad to see Quintus Velanius again, and talk things over with him.

Æmilia never quite knew how to deal with her husband's barbarians; not that Meromic was difficult: he played with the children and looked after the home farm; often she didn't see him from one day's end to the next. But sometimes she met him roaming about the fields and talking to himself in Gallic; she knew his story and more than once she had felt she would like to say something sympathetic, but somehow when she got near enough she never could: he was so big and different, and she was never quite sure if he liked her or not. It was all a little trying.

Meromic rather hated the days when Titus Barrus

was away; he went down to see Lerrys at his house from time to time, and Lerrys talked about his land and his children, what he was going to do and they were going to do, and then, just sometimes, of the past. But he was happy, happier perhaps than he would ever have been in his own wild Colchian hills; Coisha, the Hæduan, she was happy, she had never really known what her country was; and some day perhaps the children might be Roman citizens and soldiers. Sometimes Meromic would find Dith and talk to him; but he felt just a little that Dith was clear enough about some things and was always now despising him for what he had done; he never got any satisfaction out of the Briton. Often he felt desperately that he must be among other people, but then suddenly he would feel just as much that he must be alone, and he would go off into the oak woods to the north or west. There was a brown pond among the trees, shallow and full of leaves, but the only place for miles round where he could swim; afterwards he would sit on the bank, getting dry, and swing his feet in the water, and sing low his wolf song, and tell himself long stories of what might have happened if—or if—or if—and look and listen and prowl through the hollows of dim air under the oak boughs, and whisper the names of dead friends. But always he came back at nightfall to food and rest and the cool balconies of the Italian house.

He had come in one day when the children were going to bed, and Caius had demanded a story and climbed on to his knee; Lælia snuggled up beside him and started sucking her thumb.

"A short story," said the nurse.

"A long story!" said Caius; "the story about the princess and the deer."

Meromic began; it was a story he knew so well that he could go on telling it and think about something else all the time; now he was thinking that Titus would be back soon and wondering what he would have seen. The story went on. "And Esa of the Blue Mantle followed the deer through a hundred glens and round a hundred sea-lochs, and she heard the wild geese crying overhead but never knew if it was night or morning till she came to a great white castle, standing alone on a hill-top——" He heard voices outside: Titus and Æmilia; the story wavered.

"Go on! Go on!" cried Caius, and he took it up again.

"Then the deer went three times left-handways round the castle and ran in over the threshold and up through the hall; and there were two old women sitting in the high place, and full cups on the table before them, and Esa——" They were coming in, Æmilia saying supper would be ready in a few minutes, Titus asking what the children had been doing all the week.

"And then?" asked Caius, but Meromic got half up, holding the child to him: "Oh, what did you see?"

Titus came over quickly: "Meromic, I was glad you weren't there."

"Did you see—him?"

"Yes."

"And now?" The Roman said nothing, but Meromic knew, and went white: "He's been killed?"

"Yes. But don't, don't! Æmilia, take the children away!"

For Meromic had fallen back on to the seat, shivering and looking straight in front of him. Caius clamoured, "The story! I want the end of the story!" but they were swept out, and the two men left together.

"Now tell me; tell me everything," said Meromic.

Titus sat down beside him, frowning. "Well," he said, "it was mostly the soldiers; they went by with their crowns, and the fifes playing. And Cæsar stood in the car with the white horses; he's looking older now. And they had pictures of the battles, not very like; there was one of Curdun, but you wouldn't have known it. And there was armour, and swords and spears; and crested helmets. And there were two or three carved prows from your Venetan ships; and models of houses and towns and strong places. And there was gold and silver and enamel work, and painted jars and fur; and one great wagon full of woven stuff, all colours like you wear it. And then there were necklaces and jewels laid out on black cloth. It went on for hours."

"But the prisoners?"

"Well, there weren't so many, after all this time. There were some Britons, and Germans, wearing furs."

"Yes; but—my own people. Him."

"Oh, Meromic, I hate telling you! Don't mind too much; it's all over. They were there, in chains, led along; I didn't want to see it: every one yelling! Vercingetorix was first; then more chiefs, many I'd heard of, some I'd seen; among them one you'd know: Lucter of the Cadurci."

"Lucter there too! Oh my God, my God. I thought he'd escaped that, I thought he was well dead! They've kept him all these years in the dark. Oh, better to have died at Uxeldun! Go on; what did they look like?"

"They were white and bent and grey-haired mostly. Vercingetorix—oh, you oughtn't to know!"

"I must."

"They'd made him wear all his old armour and that gay-coloured cloak of his we knew so well, only not the sword. It seemed as if he couldn't bear the weight of it, I saw his knees shake as he passed; that great winged helmet was a mockery on him, his head was down on his chest, he looked at the ground all the time. They'd kept the black horse alive somehow, but it was all skin and bone. And I remembered how we'd seen him flaming through the battle, how we shook at the sight of him! Now this: they shouldn't do it! And the others: all in their armour, all in chains; some of them were afraid, kept on looking about them, started at every howl from that crowd; some of them were crying, begging for mercy, but one couldn't hear what they said; the rest were almost worse, your Lucter among them: they didn't seem to hear anything, they were like dead men walking. I don't know how any one could have hated them still; but they did, they threw stones."

"Stones: yes. And the end?"

"Well, at the finish of the day Cæsar went up under the arches to sacrifice; then at the foot of the hill most of the prisoners died: Vercingetorix and Lucter and all but a few of the chiefs."

"How?"

"Strangled with cords."

"Not even the axe. Did you see?"

"No. I heard it was over quick. I think it was not Cæsar's doing, but the judgment of the State." Meromic had his hand over his face; Titus could see the tears running down between his fingers, and looked away, longing for something to break through this choked silence, that was filled with Meromic's short, hard breathing.

Æmilia came into the dusky room, with a long, white dress, her hair low on her neck, a lamp in her hand: the genius of the home. She stood by the doorway and called them out to supper; Titus rose: "I'll follow you." She went out; he turned and laid a hand on the Gaul's shoulder: "Are you coming, Meromic?"

Meromic looked up and shook his head; when Titus left him he went to his room and threw himself down on his bed half stunned by the news. He had not realized before that it made any difference to him that Vercingetorix was still alive; he had thought all that was past, but he knew now that he had forgotten and forgiven nothing.

After a little he tried to sleep, but it was no use; he was picturing those inglorious and unavenged deaths at the foot of the hill. Gaul had been free, but now Rome was the master everywhere; Vercingetorix and Lucter his friend, they had been free, now in chains they had been led to the death of slaves. And he himself had sailed his own free waves once with Fiommar: now he was living in the house and by the compassion of his enemy!

In the woods to the north he heard a wolf howling, very far away: little of a wolf he had shown himself, to wear the Roman dress and play with the Roman children! He leapt out of bed and stood in the dark, naked and quivering, his heart suddenly full of murder. He thought of Titus, not as his friend, the one man to be depended on, trusted in, but as the enemy, potentially the slayer of Vercingetorix, and not him alone, his father, his sister, Caltane, Molhir—their faces thronged in his mind! He thought of the children, not as the little Caius who played horses with him, the little Lælia he carried about the garden, but only as means to his revenge, small things, easy for a one-armed man to kill. Hastily he went over to the wall, and took down the broad-bladed Gallic knife.

The howling of the wolves was nearer and louder; he went to the window; the lawn was grey with dew, the white roses hung stilly; a night-jar swished past him with its thick purr. He lifted up his left hand, with the knife, consecrating it and himself. The wolves were very near; a pair of shining eyes showed at the far side of the lawn. Suddenly he had an idea that it was sunrise and looked eastward, half expecting to see the stars pale with morning. But it was black midnight: why then? what sense had guessed at daybreak? He stood listening: all round him, from the creepers on the house, there was a stir of wings, the first clear, sweet notes of dawn-awakened birds. The story-teller was coming across the lawn, leaving dark footprints in the dew; behind him a wolf trotted, another bayed from the shadow of the arbutus-tree.

Meromic dropped his knife. "What are you doing," he asked, "so far from Gaul?"

"It is not so far as you would think," said the story-teller, "in a night I shall be back."

Meromic knelt at his feet: "Take me!"

The story-teller laid his hand on the bowed head.

Meromic's room stood empty; his knife lay on the window-sill, rust beginning to gather in the dew spots; on the paths and under the bushes there were tracks of wolves, and one wolf that went lame of the right fore-foot; the tracks went north. . . .

Epilogue

Amor Mortis Conturbat Me

YOUR friends have known me, I have not failed them,
When pain and terror and life assailed them
I drew them close in my arms and haled them
Home to my everlasting rest.

Their souls are free and exempt forever
From hope and passion and vain endeavour,
Whom all eternity shall not sever
From dreamless sleep on my cool soft breast.

Their shells and frosts and unending trouble
Are ceased and vanishéd like a bubble,
And lo, I have rewarded them double
For all their labour and all their pain.

For the soul from being at last reposes,
And the open secret my door discloses
Is fairer than God or women or roses:
O come, you shall not return again.

J. B. S. HALDANE.

Principal Books Used

Cæsar, "The Gallic Wars"; Rice Holmes, "Cæsar's Conquest of Gaul" and "Ancient Britain and the Invasions of Julius Cæsar"; Ferrero, "Rise and Decline of Rome"; Camille Julian, "Histoire de la Gaule" and "Vercingétorix"; Déchelette, "Manuel d'Archeologie"; Holder, "Alt-Celtischer Sprachschatz"; and the British Museum's Guide to the Antiquities of the Early Iron Age. And I am most grateful to Mr. Rice Holmes for his advice and criticisms, even though I have not always adopted them. The two towns, Rodec and Curdun, are not real. Also, Britons shaved.

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